

BEADLE'S DIME NOVELS--No. 25.

THE PEON PRINCE,

OR
THEM

YANKEE KNIGHT ERRANT



A TALE OF MODERN MEXICO.

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BY A. J. H. DUGANNE,

AUTHOR OF "MASSASOIT'S DAUGHTER," "THE KING'S MAN," ETC.

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THE PEON PRINCE;

OR,

PUTNAM POMFRET'S MEXICAN FORTUNES.

CHAPTER I.

THE BRIGANDS AT HOME.

It was the autumn of 1845. The sun was gilding with his retiring beams the tops of that extended reach of mountain steppes, rising one above another from the sea-coast of Mexico, far up to the vast table-land on which its capital is built, and higher still to the eternal snows of regions beyond. The shades of night were stalking like giant phantoms up the sides of precipices, and over the dense forests, and a singular golden mist blended with the brown haze which is the twilight of those climes, and is immediately succeeded by the glorious light and beauty of semi-tropical constellations.

Upon the summit of one of the mountain ridges, overlooking the surrounding country, was situated, at the period of our story, the stronghold of a notorious band of brigands, whose name had long been the terror of the neighboring villages, as well as of many unfortunate merchants who transacted the trade between seaboard and inland cities, and who never trusted themselves in the vicinity of the "Outlaw's Mount," as it was called, without a strong guard of soldiers, hired at a heavy price from the Commandant of the nearest garrison. These soldiers, as well as their Commandant, found it, as may easily be imagined, so profitable a business to protect the caravans, that they took little pains to drive the brigands from their fortresses, or attack them by any regular system of warfare. Indeed, so intrenched were the outlaws, and so desperate were they known to be, it would have been a hazardous business to attempt their destruction.

At the present hour, the edge of evening, the brigands' retreat presented a motly appearance. In the midst of a thick growth of wood was a circular "clearing," marked by decayed trunks of trees and huge rocks, in the center of which could be seen the entrance to one of those mountain caves common in the passes of Mexico, used long ago, doubtless, as places of refuge for the hunted children of the soil, when the Spanish conquerers, asserting tyrannic dominion, subjected the hapless aborigines to a cruel servitude. Scattered

around, before the cavern mouth, were several groups of men, of wild appearance, clad in a costume half savage and half military.

Each man was armed with a carabine, and a brace of large pistols hung at his belt, from which also depended a short sword or knife, shaped somewhat like the creese of a Malay, and which is the same kind of weapon as that used among the *llaneros* of South America, in slaying the wild buffalo on their extensive prairies or *pampas*. A blanket cloak, or *poncho*, was thrown across the shoulders of each, covering a leather jacket, and lower garments of untanned buffalo-hide. It might be difficult to bring together a more ferocious-looking set of fellows in any place save among the mongrel descendants of Spanish buccancers.

Nevertheless, though ill-looking enough, they appeared at the present time to be enjoying themselves vastly; for, in the midst of the party, upon a rocky shelf, stood a large skin of wine, to which each, as occasion offered, applied his tin canteen, and imbibed with much seeming relish its sparkling contents. All at the same time mingled in a rapid stream of conversation, as if every one was fearful he should not have an opportunity to deliver his opinion.

"Ho, Lopez, a song!" cried a burly fellow, the nearest to the wine-skin, and who appeared, withal, to have already become pretty well acquainted with its contents.

"Not I," returned Lopez, a younger member of the group who lazily puffed his cigar at the other side of the wine-skin. "Not I, drunken Spaltro; but I'll give you else than a song, if you quit not your winks and nods at Berta yonder."

Saying this, the young man glanced toward a female, quite youthful and handsome, who stood near the group, occupied in filling the cups of those furthest from the wine-skin.

"Ho! ho!" laughed Spaltro, rolling his tongue over his lips contemptuously. "You must be jesting, Master Lopez. Come hither, Berta—give me another cup of wine with your pretty fingers, and then a kiss, to sweeten the wine, my girl. Let us see if Don Lopez will keep his threat."

"You shall have no wine from my fingers, Spaltro," cried the young girl, gayly. "And as for a kiss, you are too old and ugly even to expect such luxuries."

This sally of the girl was received with a loud laugh by those who heard it, except by Spaltro himself; who staggered to his feet, and muttering, "Ah, we shall see," endeavored to lay hold upon the handsome cup-bearer. But the damsel dextrously eluded him.

"Aha, we shall see all about that," continued Spaltro, tipsily pursuing the girl. "Come here, little child! *Diablo!* how fast it runs!"

"Pester not the child, Spaltro," roared Lopez. "Do we not all know she hates you?"

"I pester you, braggart Lopez, if you hold not your peace. Stand aside, till I have a kiss from the girl."

"Aha! you think, old comrade, to get what our Berta has never

given to one of us young and handsome gallants. Be off, else my musket-stock shall remind your weak head of its vanity."

But the intoxicated brigand took little heed of the threats and abuse of his young comrade. He staggered forward, and would probably have reached the young girl, had not Lopez suddenly thrown out the stock of his carabine, which, entangling Spaltro's feet, brought him sprawling to the ground.

"Lie you there, illustrious Spaltro," said Lopez, while the rest set up a vociferous shout that enraged the discomfited ruffian to the last degree.

"By St Dominic!" he yelled, rising to his feet, with a murderous gleam in his bloodshot eye, "you shall die for that insult, Lopez!"

And, raising his carabine to his shoulder, he took deliberate aim at his laughing antagonist.

But the girl Berta crept softly up behind him, and slyly emptied a cup of wine upon the priming of the leveled gun.

"Fire away, valiant Spaltro," cried Lopez, with a laugh of derision; for he had noticed Berta's maneuver.

Spaltro dropped his carabine.

"Ten thousand devils!" roared he. "But *this* shall do the business!"

Drawing his knife, he rushed toward Lopez, who now, in turn, presented the muzzle of his own piece.

At this moment, a quick footstep was heard, and a tall figure suddenly emerged from the cave. A whisper ran around the group.

"It is the Captain!"

The "Captain" was a terrible-looking fellow. He had an eye like that of a hawk, and long, snaky locks hung over his shoulders. At this time, he wore a dark frown upon his forehead.

"What means this quarrel?" was his first exclamation, as, advancing into the center of the group, his quick eye caught the aspect of affairs. "Are ye about to cut your throats as soon as your leader's back is turned, comrades? Have a care, or my hand will do the cutting for you. Speak! Spaltro—Lopez—what do you mean?"

"He insulted me!" muttered Spaltro, in a sullen voice.

"That's a lie!" cried Lopez.

"Silence! both of you!" thundered the Captain. "No more quarrels—but shake hands!"

"Not I," said Spaltro.

"Nor I, by St. Juan!" muttered Lopez.

By St. Juan, but you shall!" cried the robber Captain, drawing a pistol from his belt. He then motioned to the young girl who had been the innocent cause of the dispute.

"Berta," said he, "bring me a cup of wine."

The damsel silently obeyed, while the band regarded their Captain with anxious looks.

"Now mark me, *comrades*," continued the brigand leader, fixing

his fierce glance upon the two malcontents, and lifting to his lips the cup of wine. "You will not shake hands. *May bueno!* Nevertheless, if you do not shake hands before I shall have swallowed the wine—*valgame Dios!* you both die! Do you understand me?"

So saying, the brigand chief placed the cup to his lips, and turning his head away, began slowly to drink.

Spaltro cast a savage look at his Captain, and clenched his teeth together in sullen determination. Lopez moved not from his position, his back being turned to his antagonist, though it was apparent that the young bandit understood his leader's command as one not to be trifled with, for his ruddy complexion became at once deadly pale.

"The business is serious, for our Captain will certainly keep his word," muttered Lopez to himself, half turning his head to catch a glimpse of his adversary. Spaltro's brow was knit gloomily, and his eyes bent to the ground, but he made no movement of reconciliation. "I'll die," cried Lopez, "before I give my hand *first!*"

The Captain continued to drink his wine slowly, and the young girl watched his face with a fearful interest, while the band gathered in a semicircle around. The last drop was at length drained from the cup, and the brigand chief removed it from his lips.

"Have ye done it?" he cried, dashing the goblet to the ground, and cocking his pistol with a sharp click. He turned about, as he spoke, toward the men, and beheld the sullen Spaltro preserving the same dogged demeanor which he had at the outset assumed. It was but one instant that he saw this, for in the next his pistol was discharged, and Spaltro, leaping from his feet, fell a corpse upon the ground.

The whole band uttered a cry of horror, for not one of them had believed that their leader would proceed to this extremity. But the Captain gazed around the circle with a fierce expression, and shouted to the remaining rebel:

"Lopez! kneel down!"

Lopez, trembling like a child, looked from the body of his late antagonist to the faces of his shuddering companions. He read in their white cheeks the horror which their leader's act inspired, and he half resolved to call upon them to avenge their comrade. Had he acted upon this impulse, and boldly confronted the Captain, the spell of terror might have been broken at once; but he hesitated, and the next instant, his eye was transfixed and ruled by the mastering glance of his chief.

"Lopez! kneel down!"

The young robber knelt, and the Captain drew another pistol from his belt, while not a movement was heard among the surrounding brigands. Again the sharp click of a lock sounded fearfully distinct.

But this time the deadly report did not follow for, as the muzzle of the weapon pointed at the heart of the youth, the Captain's arm was suddenly arrested, and Berta, the young girl, flung herself at his feet.

"Oh, spare him!" she shrieked.

Her beautiful olive face was thrown backward, her long black hair streaming wildly to the ground. Tears gushed from her eyes, and her lips were parted in agonized entreaty. The Captain paused, and a low murmur ran through the band.

"What say you—has he not merited death?" asked the chief, in a tone so fierce and haughty that the foremost of the mourning group sunk back. "Speak! am I your chief, or not?"

Every man was silent; not one pleaded for his comrade's life.

"No, no! he shall not die—no, no!" murmured the young Berta, still clinging to the arm of the stern brigand.

"Lopez! do you hear? Our comrades are willing that you should die, like Spaltro, rather than discipline be lost in the band which I command. Is it not so, *amigos*?" he continued, turning to the group around.

A low assent came from the robbers.

"It is well. You hear, Lopez—your life is justly forfeited! Only one pleads for you—the poor little Berta. Nevertheless, I shall grant Berta's request. Your life is spared. Go, comrade, and let us have no more quarreling!"

Lopez arose from his knees like one who had seen a spirit, so ghastly were his features. The Captain turned toward the rest and called:

"Pedro!"

A young brigand sprung promptly forward.

"Pedro, you are cunning and vigilant. I have business for you. To-night, comrades, we shall have booty."

"*Viva Marañ!*" shouted the band, rejoiced at this intelligence, and already forgetful of the slain Spaltro.

"To-night, I will lead you on a rich enterprise. We shall attack the house of Murillo the Rich. Pedro, go at once, disguise yourself well, and reconnoiter the whole firm. Learn if there be suspicious about, and bring me tidings ere the moon scales the 'Outlaw's Mount.' You understand me, comrade?"

"Am I to enter the house?"

"If possible."

"I will go, then, Captain, as a wandering minstrel. We have an excellent bandolin in the cave, that belonged to a poor devil of an actor whom we shot in our attack on the Vera Cruz caravan. With such an instrument, noble Captain, doubtless I can charm Murillo's household."

"Be wary, Pedro, and lose no time. Ere the moon climbs yonder tree-tops, we must march."

Pedro seized his carbine, and disappeared within the cavern, to prepare for the enterprise, while the chief, advancing to the wine-skin, filled a cup of the red liquor.

"Comrades," cried he, "pledge me this toast: To the wine-casks and cellars of Murillo the Rich!"

"Bravo! bravo! long live our noble Captain!" shouted the brigands. "Long live the brave Marañ!"

And, filling anew their cups, they drank to the health of their chief, while at their feet lay the stark corpse of Spedro their comrade.

CHAPTER II.

LOVE AND DAGGERS.

INEZ MURILLO, only daughter of the rich farmer whose house is to be attacked, was one of the handsomest maidens of the whole valley.

She had black, velvet looking eyes, and a complexion of that rich olive which imparts such a luxurious appearance to the Southern women. Her hair, glossy and jetty, was always braided most bewitchingly, and many a lover sighed to possess only one little lock of it. In truth, Inez was a charming creature, and it is no wonder at all that she turned the heads of half the valley youths.

Besides all this, Inez was an heiress, and the immense drives of cattle, broad meadows and well-filled money-bags of Murillo the Rich, were no small items in the schedule of the maiden's attractions.

It may well be believed, then, that Inez had no lack of suitors. But the most prominent among those who aspired to the hand and fortune of Murillo's daughter, were two individuals, whose character and attractions threw their more rustic rivals in the shade. One of these, named Antonio La Vega, was an officer of cavalry, whose regiment was stationed at a post about a couple of leagues distant. And the other was a stranger, who had resided but a few months in the vicinity, but who appeared to be a man of immense wealth, and extremely liberal. He had purchased a house from Murillo, and resided in it, with one servant and an old housekeeper.

Both of these suitors of Inez were elegant men, with good features and graceful manners. La Vega always wore a dashing uniform, and rode a magnificent horse, which, when the cavalier descended at Murillo's gate, was generally covered with foam. Don Martinez, the other lover, was a tall, majestic-looking man, with long, curling locks, and a shaggy moustache, over his lip. Both of them had **very white teeth, and flashing black eyes.**

But, in spite of the fascinations possessed by these two cavaliers, Senorita Inez did not love either of them; and, though she was somewhat of a coquette, and liked very well to receive the attentions and attention of both, she never for one thought seriously of marriage. So, though her father often talked to her of Antonio's rank, and Murillo's riches, she continued to rattle away with each of them, never allowing an opportunity for a serious declaration of passion.

In fact, (gentle reader we will let you into a secret, as you are

sure to find it out, if you read on,) the Senorita was in love with somebody else. She did not know it herself, and perhaps she would not have believed any one who should tell her of it; nevertheless, it is true, she was in love with Lorenzo the artist.

Ah! who was Lorenzo the artist?

Nobody—in deed, nobody! A poor youth, “nothing but an artist,” as Inez used to whisper to herself, who spent his time in making pictures all over the valley, and writing sonnets and madrigals. How could it be possible that the daughter of the rich Murillo should ever think of so humble a youth!

To be sure, Lorenzo was very handsome, and every body said that he knew a great deal, though the villagers generally agreed that his learning would not get him a living. He had large, expressive eyes, with long lashes, and dark, flowing ringlets, glossy as those of Inez herself. He possessed a rich voice, and it was delicious to hear him sing his own songs, in the still night, to the accompaniment of a guitar. In spite of herself, Inez acknowledged that she could not help *loving* Lorenzo, but as for love——

This was the state of affairs at the time to which our present chapter returns; that is to say, three days previous to the night on which the attack was to be made by the brigands on old Murillo's house.

Captain Antonio La Vega had just dismounted at Murillo's gate as usual leaving his steel in a form, and Inez was preparing herself to listen to his customary flatteries—in fact, the young officer was about taking the maiden's hand, and seating himself by her side, beneath the vine-covered porch, when, at such an unlucky moment, Don Martino appeared likewise at the gate.

Now, as the reader doubtless suspects, these two rivals were not on the best terms. They never met without exchanging frowns and flashing glances. Now, Martino had to bite his lips to keep from uttering a savage oath.

“Come, come, Senors,” cried Inez, gayly, when she perceived how tempestuous her admirers were getting, “do not frighten one with such terrible looks. Listen to me; I wish you both to be friends.”

So saying, she tapped Antonio's cheek with her fan.

“I have nothing to say to men in *livery*,” said Martino, glancing scornfully at the brilliant uniform which La Vega wore.

The officer sprung instantly to his feet.

“What do you mean, villain?” he cried, grasping his sword-hilt.

“Villain to your teeth!” returned Don Martino, fiercely.

“Ha! what say you?” exclaimed the soldier.

And, drawing his sword, he made a lunge at Martino, which would probably have been fatal had not the blow been suddenly arrested by a new comer.

This was no other than Lorenzo, the young artist, who had reached the gate just in time to hear the last words of La Vega, and beheld him strike the pose at Martino. The youth had dextrously interposed his guitar, which hung from his neck by a ribbon, and thus caught

and turned aside the officer's weapon, not, however, without every string of the instrument being snapped asunder.

"*Diablo!*" muttered La Vega. "Oat, peasant!"

He endeavored, as he spoke, to strike the young artist, but the hand of Inez stayed his arm.

"Senor," she said, calmly, "you forget yourself, somewhat. Sheathe your sword.

"Not till I chastise this insolent," cried Antonio.

"Coward!" muttered Don Martino, with a low laugh, "I am unarmed, you perceive. You are brave, like the rest of your mongrel soldiers."

"We shall meet again," said La Vega.

Then, turning abruptly toward the artist:

"How dare you, base peasant, arrest my sword?" he cried, with a half-suppressed oath.

"To prevent you, Senor, from disgracing your profession by slaying an unarmed man," replied Lorenzo, returning the other's fierce look with an undaunted gaze.

"You must be taught a lesson," said the officer, advancing toward the youth.

But Inez Murillo stepped quickly between them. She looked steadily first at La Vega and then at Don Martino, which last gentleman stood leaning against the gate, with his arms folded, and a cautious smile on his dark lips.

"Listen, Senors," said the daughter of Murillo, in a clear voice. "You have both disgraced yourselves this day. Ay, disgraced yourselves!" she continued, drawing up her beautiful form with a gracefully motion, as she noticed the angry glances, "and henceforth I will not receive the attentions of either of you. You have both, I perceive, bad and unruly passions, and I can never love such men."

"But hear me!" cried La Vega.

"Senorita," began Martino.

"I have spoken my decision," said the maiden firmly. "Henceforth desire not the friendship of either of you!"

And taking the arm of Lorenzo, the artist, who had silently, but secretly well pleased, listened to her words, Inez entered the cottage.

La Vega cast a furious glance at Martino, and dashing rudely by him, sprung into the saddle.

"You shall hear from me again!" he cried.

"With all my heart, soldier!" replied Martino.

La Vega galloped away, and for a few moments Don Martino remained standing at the gate. Then he advanced a step as if to follow the Senorita; but, checking himself, turned slowly toward the cottage.

"The proud girl!" he muttered. "I will teach her what it is to insult me. We shall be even yet!"

So saying, he directed his steps toward the house which was his residence, about a mile from Martino's dwelling. Arrived there, he immediately summoned his servant.

"Petro," said he to him, "we must be moving; we have been idle long enough."

"So, I am to praise I, Captain!" answered Petro. "I'm heartily tired of this life."

"We leave the valley to-night, and to-morrow I shall be myself again."

"And how goes the working, noble Captain?"

"Of that I shall myself take care," answered the master, with a frown, which seemed at once to repress all curiosity in the servant. "Say no more now," continued Don Martino, "but make ready for our departure."

"As you say, noble Captain," returned Petro.

Early the next morning, a challenge to mortal combat from Captain Antonio La Vega to Don Martino reached the house of the latter. But the messenger was informed by the old housekeeper that her master and his servant had left for a long journey, and that she knew not when they would return.

CHAPTER III.

LOVE'S STRATAGEMS.

When Captain Antonio La Vega rode away from the house of Martino, his horse burned with the most violent passions, among which hatred of Don Martino (or, as the moderns know, Martin,) was perhaps the strongest. The contemptuous dismissal which he had received from the Senorita Inez, coupled with jealousy of his rival, kindled his spirit to a pitch of fury. He conceived that Inez loved Martino, and that her angry words to him were but a cloak to hide her interest.

"He is with her now, doubtless," muttered the soldier. "Fool that I was to give way so easily!"

Checking the speed of his horse, he half turned to retrace his course. But a moment's reflection satisfied him that to return would be useless; for, if the Senorita had really deceived him, he knew it would be vain to attempt a renewal of his suit.

"I will have my revenge, nevertheless!" he cried, with a deep oath. "By San Pedro, this proud girl shall rue her scorn! And Martino—he shall never live to triumph over me!"

When La Vega arrived at this conclusion, he had likewise reached the barracks where the soldiers under his command were stationed. Descending, he immediately sought a brother officer, with whom he was on terms of close intimacy.

Don Ferrando Nunez was another Captain, serving in the same regiment with La Vega. They had long known each other, and though their characters were very dissimilar, were united in the

firmest friendship. La Vega was passionate and revengeful, and, where his interest or pleasure were concerned, he stopped at nothing to obtain his objects.

Nunez, on the contrary, was a good-humored, careless soldier, full of excitement, and reckless of danger. He liked his brother officer, because he knew him to be brave, and he never paused to inquire whether La Vega was depraved or wicked. Antonio, with a penetrating mind and unscrupulous conscience, never failed to use his friend whenever he needed him; and as Nunez generally seconded his wishes, he had begun to consider the latter as much in the light of a tool as a companion.

On the present occasion, La Vega resolved to engage his brother soldier in a scheme to obtain revenge for himself upon those who had insulted him; and for this purpose he proceeded at once to the quarters of Nunez. He found the Captain discussing a bottle of wine, and throwing himself upon a chair, he poured out a glass of the liquor, and swallowed it at a draught.

"Well, Antonio," said Nunez, "how speeds your suit with the fair Inez?"

"The devil take her!" cried La Vega, replacing the glass with violence on the table.

"*Valgame Dios!* What! A quarrel, comrade?"

"You shall hear," replied La Vega.

And he proceeded to speak of his adventure at the farm-house, the particulars of which were related in the last chapter.

"And what do you intend?" asked Nunez, when La Vega had concluded his recital.

"Intend!" cried Antonio. "To revenge myself upon the whole brood. What else should I do? The girl shall repeat her treatment to me, and sue for my forgiveness; and as for that scoundrel, Martino, and the base peasant-boy who had the boldness to stay my arm, by San Pedro, they shall both die!"

"I think, *amigo*, you ought to be thankful to that 'base' peasant, as you style him, inasmuch as he prevented what, to my mind, is a grievous sin—the slaying of an unarmed man."

"By heaven! what are you saying?" cried La Vega, impatiently. "You are repeating the slave's own words."

"I am right, for all that," returned Nunez; "and so you will say, after reflection. For my part, Antonio, I think the youth seemed very much like a gentleman, in meeting your sword with his blade."

"*Dia'los!* do you desire to drive me mad? I come to you for assistance, and here you take part with my enemies."

"Nay, Antonio! Not only do I not side with your enemies, but, by the bones of Cortez, if you tell me to take your quarrel on myself, there's my hand, comrade!"

"I fight my own battles," said La Vega, coldly.

"Then, by St. Iago—fight Don Martino forthwith, *amigo*, and we shall have you in good-humor again. Come, and I await at once, and when you've run him through the body, take a good drink

go and make your own peace with Marillo's daughter ! What say you, comrade ? ”

“ That your counsel agrees with my purpose. To-morrow you shall ride over to this Don Martino Pinales, and bear him my mortal hatred.”

“ Enough, *amigo*,” said Nunez. “ Let us consider the business settled, and I beg you will fill up your glass.”

So, next morning, betimes, Don Ferrarbo Nunez mounted his horse, and galloped down the valley road to its other extremity, where was situated the old mansion within which he expected to meet Don Martino. But, as we have seen, the cavalier who bore that name was not to be found, having departed suddenly, with his servant. Nunez, therefore, was obliged to resign his brother officer, without accomplishing the object of his morning ride; and La Vega, looking with rage, which vented itself in curses, became so unreasonable to reach the verge of a quarrel with his friend. But Don Ferrarbo preserved his good temper.

“ Come, Antonio, this can not be helped,” cried the frank soldier. “ I shall not run you through for this Martino, who will, it is likely, return to the valley ere long. As for yourself, you are a poor lover if you do not improve your rival's absence, by pressing your suit to the maiden.”

“ Maledictions on him ! ” muttered La Vega. “ But, as you say, Ferrarbo, the maiden—”

“ Ah ! the maiden,” rejoined Nunez. “ Now that this truculent fellow, Martino, is out of the way, you can find no difficulties in that quarter, *amigo* ! ”

“ I'm not so sure of it,” cried La Vega, moodily; “ though I'll wager my life that she loves me—that is to say, she would love me if we were wedded.”

“ And why not wed at once, *amigo* ? ”

“ Very good talk, if there was not an old Murillo the Rich in one's way.”

“ In one's way, say you ? Since how long have money bags been in a poor cavalier's way, comrade ? ”

“ I tell you, Nunez, you know nothing about my affairs.”

“ 'Tis your own fault, then, comrade. Why do you not tell me ? Am I not your sworn friend ? ”

“ Ah ! ” cried La Vega, with a crafty glance at his comrade's honest face; “ If we could depend on a friend to stand by one—”

“ By the bones of Cortez—”

“ Through fire and water—”

“ Good the word, comrade. What do you want ? ”

“ By St. Pedro ! I want Murillo's daughter ! ” replied La Vega.

“ And if Don Ferrarbo Nunez will stand by me—”

“ By the bones—”

“ I'll carry her off and marry her in spite of a hundred fathers ! ”

“ Bravo ! ” cried Nunez, jumping up, and oversetting his camp-stool. “ That's spoken like the Gal, and I'm your comrade against

old Murillo and his money-bags. You shall have her, amigo, and Padre Torvaso can tie the knot here in our barracks, in spite of—"

La Verga smiled grimly, as he returned the warm grasp of his comrade's hand. "I shall count on you, Ferrardo."

"As yourself, by St. Juan! And now, amigo, when shall it be done?"

"To-morrow night. We will detach a party, under pretence of securing the mountain for brigands. At midnight, we can descend upon the valley, surround Murillo's house, and—"

"The Senorita—she will be prepared—"

"I shall provide for that! If the household become alarmed, you and our men must cover our flight."

"But should the Senorita get frightened?"

"Leave the Senorita to me, Nancez. We shall understand one another. And remember—strict secrecy!"

"Oh! you may depend upon me, comrade. To-morrow night you shall win your bride, in spite of old Moneybags!"

"To-morrow night, Ferrardo!"

CHAPTER IV.

PUTNAM POMFRET AND THE GREASERS.

WHILE the incidents related in the first chapter of our story were transpiring, there might have been observed, on a road which wound through the valley that skirted the "Outlaw's Mount," a pedestrian whose habiliments were an odd mixture of garments, which bespoke a stranger in those parts. To a tall person, at least six feet in height, some ten inches of beaver hat gave a lofty and athletic appearance; shrunken white breeches, and a swallow-tailed blue overcoat, decorated with a yellow *pouchito* and crimson sash, the bearer of denoting his nationality, so far as that might be done by costume. The man's face was browned by the sun; his eyes were black and sparkling, like any Mexican *hombre*; but, there was in his face an expression of humor and shrewdness, mingled with entire self-reliance, which marked its possessor as belonging to a more northern section of the American continent. In fact, reader, our pedestrian was a Yankee, which means, in every foreign land, some offshoot of that great Anglo-Saxon stock, whose footsteps track the paths of empire from the pine woods of Ancestry to California's coasts; from the wild sweep of icy seas upon Labrador's beaches, to the surf of billowing waves in Pacific harbors.

Twilight was deepening into dusk in the more thinly wooded mountains, though sufficient day yet lingered to render the principal objects of surrounding objects to the wayfarer's eye, which appeared to

keep a sharp lookout on either side: for this valley-road was but a narrow foot-path, though on a direct course to the neighbouring city. I did not see anything on the path, and stretched back into the forest, a mist whose shadowy shadows brooded a supernatural silence.

"Well," said the solitary wayfarer, as he passed his path with measured strides, "I'd be d-d-r-r-r-ted if I ain't gettin' tired o' this 'ere walkin' Spanish cross-bats! I reckon it'd pay to speculate a trade in mule-flesh, ef I kin find a critter to suit, at the next tavern. Carryin' a heavy sack is mighty independent, but I'll allow it's n-r-r-r-inconvenient." So saying, the speaker shifted a leather portmanteau from one hand to the other, at the same time prising to wipe his forehead with a red handkerchief handkerchief.

"This 'ere beats natur' for a country," continued the pedestrian, proceeding to shave himself with a morsel of James'own tobacco, which he cut from a long plug with a formidable looking jack-knife. "Would I thought of Putnam Puff-blot, fr'm Vermont, ever taking his traps over a Mex'kin turnpike? I wouldn't mind the blasted thing so much, ef there was a white critter to talk to 'casionally; but this 'ere circumnavigation all alone by ones 't, day in and day out, ain't what I reckoned on. 'Course, there's plenty o' greasers and yeller jackets; but who wants to be jabberin' with such heathen? They'll rise in a feller's face, ef he talks o' railroads; and, as for 'lectric telegraphs or locomotives, I guess they'd as soon believe in harnessin' chain-lightnin' to their old go-carts. Hallo, boss-dy! where'd you come from?"

This sudden exclamation was elicited by the abrupt appearance of a man muffled in a long brown cloak, who carried an oblong box, which evidently was some species of musical instrument; for, as the individual moved along the road, he was engaged in turning a crank and producing a series of harsh sounds to the burden of a song which he was chanting. This personage was no other than Pedro, with whom the reader is already acquainted, and who had been disappointed by his chief, an hour before, to re-annex the house of Martin de la Roca. The young brigand was now upon that errand, disguised as a wandering musician, and carrying a harly-garly, as he perambulated the valley road.

Our North American, having delivered himself of the operation, took the liberty of staring fixedly at the new-comer, who it may be thought, was in no manner to be closely inspected. The latter, indeed, stopped short in his musical performance, and placed his hand upon the butt of a pistol which popped from his mantle.

"Hallo, greaser! ye mean mischief do you?" demanded the Yankee, without changing his position. He said this in English, and then uttered a few words of a Spanish dialect, which, though extraordinarily harsh, seemed to be perfectly intelligible to the intended hearer.

"Buenos dias! Señor! yo soy amigo! Quien es usted?" was the salutation of Putnam Puff-blot, who, with his intended to annex the Mexican of his own personal interests, and learned that they were re-

ciprocated; but the brigand only responded gruffly, "*Dol tolle!*" being his vernacular for "Let me pass."

"You do! you can't, Dol Kelly! you damned yellow-skin!" exclaimed Pomfret, swinging his portmanteau from right to left; a movement which evidently alarmed the mock musician, for, in an instant his poniard-blade gleamed in the dusk, and was thrust at the other with the evident intention of transfixing him as he stood.

"*Thunder!* is that your gut, ye skunkin' cut-throat?" cried the Yankee; and, in another second, he drew a stout club from under his *pouches*, and dealt a quick blow upon the robber's arm, which knocked the knife from his clenched fingers. Then, before Pedro could possess himself of another weapon, our adventurer sprang forward like a panther, and with a single blow of his fist leveled his antagonist to the earth. This done, he pressed his knee upon the breast of the prostrate ruffian, who began to roar lustily.

"Oh, ye'll sing out, ye surpint, will ye?" exclaimed Pomfret, seating himself deliberately upon the discomfited Mexican. "But I calculate you wont try to come Paddy over a live white man from the States. Now, get up, you miserable critter, and let's see how you can measure size, or, by thunder! ye'd wate snix, sure as my name's Put Pomfret!"

Saying this, in a compound of Mexican *patois* and Green Mountain slang, that might have bewildered the most abstruse polyglot of the French Academy, our free American permitted his adversary to regain his feet. Then pressing the muzzle of a brass-barreled pistol at the robber's breast, he gave the word of command:

"Eyes right, Ingen! for-r a-r-d—march!"

Pedro uttered a yell of rage and terror, as he took to his heels, leaping from the roadside into the adjacent forest with the agility of a catamount; while Putnam Pomfret, satisfied with his exploit, proceeded with somewhat hurried steps, along the dusky highway.

Our North American was as genuine a sample of that boisterous portion of the human race yeapt "Yankees," as can possibly be imagined. He had, from an early period of life, been his "own master," or, as the poet more loftily expresses it, "lord of himself," and had improved the possession by conveying it to divers portions of the hospitable globe. Leaving in boyhood his native "Vermont," and with it the guidance of a plow and the intimacy of "Broad and Bright," his favorite oxen, he essayed his first adventures as crew-boy of a fishing-smack, bound for the "Bay of Chaleur." Thence, after achieving distinction in the mackerel line, his ambition led him to hunt Leviathan in a whale-ship: and finally, after various experiences in distant lands, a score of hardships and dangers in the wilds of his own country, as pioneer and hunter, he had "turned up," about six months previous to the opening of our story, on the road from Hartford, Connecticut, conveying a load of patent clocks to New York with the object of shipping them on speculation to Vera Cruz. Afterward, desirous of "soak" more of the world," he had become his own supercargo, and "accompanied his venture" to its

port of destination. Arrived there, and realizing a "smart profit" on his investment in *time*, he had concluded to occupy his leisure till the homeward departure of his vessel in viewing the country, and enjoying a "fishin' season."

Unfortunately, however, after a fortnight's ramble among the mountains had sufficiently gratified his piscatorial propensities, our hero returned to the seaboard just in time to find that the "Sally Ann" had sailed for the United States, carrying with her his entire "traps" and "plunder," and leaving him a "Yankee adrift," with light pockets and boundless leisure.

So, after remaining in Vera Cruz a sufficient length of time to enable him to pick up a smattering knowledge of the Spanish language, he resolved to travel inland, and was at this time on the road to Mexico, where he "calculated" he should meet with a "smart chance o' makin' a spec."

The stars were now shooting into the sky in quick succession, changing the gray gloom to brightness, save where the overhanging foliage wrapped the road in darkness; and Putnam continued his course, sometimes whistling or humming a tune, sometimes cogitating with a profound countenance, till he arrived at a spot where the thick forest was suddenly broken, and an open space of about thirty rods appeared. On one side of the narrow road at this place was a mountain cataract, which came tumbling down the rocks, and, emptying into a gully, formed a turbid stream across the road, spanned by a rude bridge of two or three parallel logs. He here paused and looked around.

The day had quite vanished, and now the moon was rising in unclouded splendor, silvering the tree tops, and flashing upon the swollen stream and waterfall. All around was still, save only the sound of the troubling cataract, and there was a loneliness about the whole scene that inspired in our hero's mind a feeling of vague uneasiness. However, after a rapid glance, Putnam kept on with a light step, and was proceeding to cross the rustic bridge, when suddenly the sound of voices caught his ear. He drew back within the shadow of the wood, and thence peered cautiously out.

At first, the Yankee could distinguish nothing; but soon, casting his glances sharply across the bridge, he discovered the figures of two men, with guns in their hands, standing in the shadow of the wood, apparently engaged in earnest conversation. Another look seemed to convince him that one of the two was the pretended musician who had attempted to stab him. The instrument was still in Pedro's belt, but he was now armed with a carabine; the bright barrel of which rested against his arm. In fact, the brigand, after his encounter with the Yankee, had fallen in with another of the band, sent out, like himself, as a scout, and the two were now together in conference—Pedro's companion being no other than the brigand Lopez.

Pedro had just finished the narration of a fierce conflict which he averred had taken place between himself and a band of strangers,

and Putnam Pomfret soon contrived to comprehend some portions of the conversation.

"Where, thank you, comrade, the scoundrels are now?" asked Pedro's companion.

"Concealed somewhere in the forest," replied Pedro. "You must have seen them had they passed the trail, Lopez."

"Ay, by San Juan! For here have I been waiting, by our Captain's orders, to intercept you, for intelligence. But how many attacked you?"

"A half-score, I am sure," avowed the robber. "I had slain some of them had I carried my trusty cut-throat."

"What a liar!" muttered Putnam Pomfret to himself.

"What sort of a fellow was their Captain, Pedro?"

"A ferocious, powerful devil of a fellow!" answered Pedro. "He was armed at all points, and a giant in strength, or he'd have bit the dust, you may be sure."

Putnam Pomfret, on hearing this description of himself, was forced to bite his lips to keep down his laughter.

"'Twere well to advise our Captain concerning such dangerous strangers in the forest. You know we've important business on hand to-night," said Pedro.

"You may well say so, Pedro; and we shall all be the richer for it."

"Ay!" returned Pedro, "and 'tis you, Lopez, who are remarkably lucky in being alive to share the spoils, instead of lying, as you might be this moment, with that broken bow, Spanish."

Lopez shuddered, and wiped his forehead.

"'Twas a hard thing, Pedro, to kill a comrade in the field. But, doubtless, that seems to you all right, as 'tis only the Captain's right-hand man."

"'Tis true, Senor Lopez; I am somewhat in Don Manuel's confidence, as you say. Hence, I know, what I tell you, that to-night's work, if it turn out right, will make us all rich men."

"And the Captain leads—himself?"

"You may be sure of that."

"Then we shall have hot work, doubtless. But speak, Pedro; since you know all about the Captain's plans, there's no harm in giving me a little hint as to where we're going. I'll be obliged to you."

"Certainly not, Lopez. You shall hear in good time," replied Pedro, confidentially. "But first let me wait my turn with the contents of that disk which I see peeping from your pocket."

Lopez drew a wine-bottle from his pocket and handed it to his comrade, who imbibed a generous draught.

Putnam Pomfret, watching the pair with anxious eyes, looked forward from the woolly shadows, seeking to glean as much of the secret which was about to be imparted as his fragmentary knowledge of the patois in which the robbers were conversing might permit.

"Now, *amigo*," began Pedro, retaining the disk in his companion's hand, "I'll wager you a skin of better liquor than this that you can

not guess what the Captain and myself have been about for three months past."

"How should I?" demanded Lopez. "Here have we all been kicking our heels against the rocks, awaiting your motions, without sport enough to keep our daggers from rusting, by St. Juan!"

"Well, wait a bit, my man. Sport comes in good time. You must know, comrade, the Captain and myself have been playing at *hidalgo*, and courting a *Senorita*."

"Both of you, eh?"

"No, comrade! Our Captain did the knight and I his squire. You must know. And whom, think you, was the lady-love, Lopez? Truly, no other but *Senorita Inez*, the daughter of *Murillo*."

"*Murillo the Rich—whose house—*"

"We are to attack this night, Lopez."

"Ah! So our Captain got tired of courting in peaceful style, and now intends to take the *Senorita* in true brigand fashion—that is, by storm, comrade!"

"Ah, Lopez, we've been laying siege to the garrison for three months, as I said; and just as it seemed to me we were getting ready for conquest—*presto—here we are—and—*"

"Well, comrade," said Lopez, as Pedro stopped abruptly.

"Did you not hear a rustling yonder?"

The two braves listened, while *Pomfret* held his breath. Then *Pedro's* voice resumed the conversation.

"Evidently there was a quarrel, and *Don Martino—*"

"*Don Martino—and pray, who was he?*"

"Why, our Captain, of course—the noble *Murani*. You perceive comrade, he was passing for a *hidalgo*—"

"Ah—a *hidalgo*! So there was a quarrel, you say?"

"Yes; and we left suddenly and rejoined the hills. But to-night, comrade, we are to attack the house, for our Captain's quarrel—"

"Ay! but our Captain allows us all the booty—"

"Except—"

"The woman! That, of course, comrade, since 'tis for love of her, you know, Lopez."

Lopez laughed gruffly.

"I suppose that, for the time being, he rates her higher than *Murillo's* money-bags. Well, comrade, every man to his taste, say I."

During these colloquies the ears of our friend, *Putnam Pomfret*, quickened by the proximity of danger so long, had lost very little of its power; and when the voice of *Pedro* became silent, the North American had already comprehended the extent of the whole treacherous scheme—which was to give *Murillo's* wealth to plunderers and his daughter to a brigand.

"Plunder!" was his muttered exclamation. "There's goin' to be the old Satan to pay, and no mistake. Somelody ought to rise the tangle-ers and jostle at this here speculation, and, if I lick can't again me, that somelody'll be *Put Pomfret*."

Thus communing with himself, the Yankee, crept back upon all

fours, began to draw himself toward the edge of the wood, endeavoring to reach a shallow portion of the stream below the bridge, which, lying under the full glare of the moonlight, was not to be thought of as means of continuing his progress. Could he succeed in finding the water-course, Pomfret doubted not that he should soon reach some habitation or village, where he might find shelter and disclose the villainy imputed against "Mr. Murillo."

But Putnam Pomfret was in the neighborhood of ears as sharp as his own; and scarcely had he crawled a dozen yards ere the voice of Lopez called out;

"Pedro! what's that?"

"Somebody in yon copse, comrade," was the reply; whereat Pomfret, springing to his feet, dashed precipitately toward the river's margin.

"'Tis the spy! Send a bullet after him! Fire, Pedro, fire!"

And the two robbers, raising their carabines, discharged them simultaneously at the flying figure. But the report of the guns was answered immediately by a low laugh from the fugitive, who appeared in full view, skirting the river's border.

"After him! Pursue! He will escape and give the alarm!"

"That's true, Lopez; but he runs like a deer, comrade."

"Dern yer pickers!" exclaimed the North American, deservingly, as he glanced back, the figures of his enemies in close pursuit; and, dodging into the bushes, he ran at full speed along the river-bank.

Meantime the brigands were greeted by the cracking of under-wood and occasional glimpses of the fugitive, who kept on with unabated swiftness till he reached an open portion of the forest; where, taking to the water, he speedily found himself on the opposite shore. Pursuing the winding water-course, Pomfret soon reached a small clearing in the woods, whereon the moonbeams fell bravely, shining every object. Here, doffing his high-crowned hat, he deposited it upon the river-bank, and then, turning abruptly, noiselessly retraced his steps.

Hardly had he repassed to the spot where he had forded the stream, before the pursuers appeared descending to it. Pomfret, hidden by the woody shadows, watched their movements, noticing when they passed and listened for his retreating footsteps, and aware that they were scrutinizing his tracks in the sand. Presently they plunged into the water, crossed the ford, and emerged so near the place of Pomfret's concealment that he could almost touch them with his hand. But they kept on, without suspecting his proximity, and soon discovered his hat where he had deposited it, whereupon they set up a shout.

"Ha! ha!" laughed Putnam Pomfret; "I ed'late two greenhorn ain't a match for one Green Mountain boy, no how you can fix it."

CHAPTER V.

HOW A TANKEE WAS OUTWITTED.

THE moon was riding the skies in unclouded splendor. Wood, valley, mountain and stream were brilliant with her soft light. The house of Murillo the Rich, bathed in floods of radiance, was the center-piece of this picture of beauty.

This house, or rather cluster of houses—for Murillo's *hacienda* was a small village in itself, accommodating a domestic army of *hacendados* and *quadrados*—consisted of an extensive range of wooden out-buildings, flanking the main edifice, which was of rough stone and *adobe* brick. A wall of solid masonry separated one side of the out-houses from the high road, while, on the other side, were a deep well and a shelf of rugged rocks, forming the lowest ridge of that mountain range which hemmed in the entire valley. On the opposite side lay a second tract of woodland, stretching to the river; and thus the dwelling of Murillo was almost surrounded by forests, rendering it no difficult matter for robbers to approach the premises without discovery, so long as they avoided the highway or remained under the shadows of the trees or rocks.

Though the moonlight fell full upon the farm-buildings, it failed to penetrate the thick woods encompassing them. Consequently the brigands who, under the eye of their Captain, Marini, were now being concealed about the place, felt as secure from scrutiny as if in their mountain stronghold. A dozen or more crouched between the highway wall and the out-houses, and these, armed with pistols, knives and carbines, awaited only their leader's signal to commence their attack upon the mansion.

Marini himself, with Matteo, his lieutenant, remained at the outskirts of the wood, watching a light which still gleamed from a window. The solitary taper, as Marini knew, was in the chamber of Inez Murillo, and he waited impatiently for the moment its extinguishment should announce that the maiden had sought her pillow; when he might ascend the balcony and be secure of his own portion of the prey ere the farmers' dependents could be aroused to defend their master.

"Are all here?" asked the robber chief of his subaltern.

"Lopez and Pedro are absent, Captain."

"They will arrive soon, without doubt. Meantime, lie close and await the signal."

Matteo crouched among his comrades, near the wall, while Marini resumed his watch of the casement.

"Now, by St. Germaino!" he muttered, "this daughter of Murillo will soon learn with whom she has been coquetting so faintly. Seek thy pillow, fair Inez, for the last time. When thou leavest it, 'twill be for the mountain throne of Marini."

The chief, smiling grimly, turned at this moment, in his walk, and found himself in abrupt collision with a figure which had emerged suddenly from the woodland shadows. In the same instant a shrill voice accosted him with, "Hallo, stranger! what in time are ye 'bout?" To which Marani answered by clatching the intruder's throat, and, placing a poniard at it, cried:

"Silence! or you die on the spot!"

"Thunder! what do you mean? Are you another hurlygurdy chap? Jes' let go o' my neckercher, if you please."

"Senor! your business? Speak quickly!" cried Marani, tightening his clutch at the Yankee's throat.

"Jerusalem! don't choke a feller! I cal'late you don't treat peaceable travelers in that fashion, do you?"

Saying this, with a quick motion of his muscular arms, Penfret released himself from Marani's hold, and at the same time seized the brigand's right wrist with a grip like a vice.

"Dern your pieter! Be you a turnpike-keeper on the high road?"

"I am the master of this place, and you can not pass!" returned Marani, cocking a pistol with his left hand, but not daring to fire, lest a premature alarm might jeopardize his plans against Marillo's house.

"And who might this place belong to?" demanded Penfret, keeping the brigand's wrist still secure.

"To Murillo el Rico."

"Be you Murillo—yourself?"

"That is my name. Speak! Have you business with me? I am apprehensive of an attack on my house, and hence must be cautious."

The robber's words and manner were so natural that Penfret was thrown off his guard. He lowered his head and said:

"Well, let's go to your house, and I'll tell you somethin' about that."

"Proceed, Senor. What have you to say? I listen."

"Well, don't get wrathful, boss-ty! I jes' want to let you know that a brigand chap named Cap'n Marani is goin' to set fire to your house this very night, and—"

"Well, *amigo*, where learned you this?"

"Heard a couple o' skunks tellin' on't up the creek yonder. Reck-on I showd 'em some tall walkin'—"

"*Muchas gracias*," said Marani. "Now, have the goodness to release my wrist, and walk to the house with me. You shall be rewarded well, Senor."

"Oh! as for that—" responded Penfret, completely deceived, and undisturbed by the brigand's wrist—"as for pay, stranger, I didn't cal'late—"

But a low whistle from Marani cut short the Yankee's protestation; the next moment he felt himself grasped by the throat and Marano he started, but the robber's hand was again at his throat.

"Comrades," whispered Marini to his men, "this scoundrel would have betrayed our design to Marillo. What shall be the fate of the spy?"

"Death!" cried Matteo, cocking his gun.

"Jerusalem!" muttered Pomfret.

"Do nothing here to alarm the house. Bear him away."

"To the cave, noble Captain? It is far."

"No. Let him say his prayers, and then finish him."

"Jerusalem!" again cried Pomfret.

But the next instant the unfortunate Yankee was bound and gagged, stripped of his valise, and hurried from the farm-house. Marini resumed his walk beside the wall, watching the light that still beamed from the window of the *Senorita Inez*.

The whole business of seizing, gagging and binding was transacted so expeditiously, that our hero had been dragged a quarter of a mile before he could regain the full possession of his scattered faculties. The stalwart brigands had each a firm clutch of his collar, while his mouth was closed with the buckle of a heavy sword-belt, and his arms fastened behind him by a stout leather thong. At the same time, a couple of pistol-barrels stared him threateningly in the face.

Patience Pomfret twitched once or twice, as the grasp of the robbers tightened round his neck, but a pretty smart blow from one of the pistol-barrels satisfied him of the folly of such a movement. He glanced nervously at the sullen features of his guards, but saw no traces of compassion.

"This comes o' gain' a fishin' in a farren kentry," inwardly lamented Pomfret. "Gosh! if I ever get out o' this scrape, dern me if I don't make tracks for New England, straight order."

But, from the present aspect of affairs, there seemed little probability that our Yankee would ever get out of his "scrape." A line of fire-breath outlaws were hurrying him along at the quickest step possible, up a rocky path into the heart of the mountain, with the avowed purpose, under orders of their chief, to cut his throat, or shoot him through the head, in as summary and noiseless a manner as could be effected. It was a situation to make an ordinary person badly nervous.

Suddenly, our hero received notice, by a violent jerk of his neck, to turn aside from the rocky path; and a moment after he was hurried or dragged across a gully, and through a cluster of tangled bushes, into the dense wood. Patience Pomfret thought him seriously that he should never see *Weatherfield* again, and would shudder run through his *hose* boots. Desperate, however, as was the case, he resolved not to perish without a struggle, though the idea of escape, being a *hose* as he was, appeared utterly unattainable. Nevertheless, he knew very well that resistance would not render his position worse, while, if fortune favored him, there was a chance of bettering it.

As for our reflection, the North American remained quiet, while the brigands drew him forward through the bushes, and they had

reached a portion of the wood so dense that scarcely a single ray of moonlight penetrated its obscurity. Here, stooping suddenly between the two guards, he dashed himself against the burly Matteo, and overturned him in an instant. Then, muzzled as he was, Penfret dashed back through the thicket in the direction of the road which they had left.

"*Diablo!*" growled the fallen robber, in a terrible voice, as, recovering himself, he grasped a sapling.

"*Corrajo!* he will escape!" cried the other brigand.

"No chance for him," said Matteo. "We will have him ere he reaches the road."

And, with fierce curses, the ruffians pursued the fugitive.

Putnam had gained but a few rods, but this, to a man running for his life, was some advantage. With his hands straining toward his back in the effort to break their fastenings, while his face grew black with the painful exertion of breathing, half-choked as he was by the bandage over his mouth, the Yankee stumbled on, through the thick growth of brambles and bushes, tearing his flesh and bruising his limbs at every step. Behind him pressed the brigands, nearing him every instant.

At last, the poor fugitive gained a glimpse of the full moon, shining upon the road and gully which he had before crossed.

"Better be shot in tryin' to get away from the sapints," said Penfret. And, with a vigorous effort, he plunged over the gully. But, alas! it was only to fall prostrate upon the edge of the narrow path.

The violence of his fall snapped the leather thong which confined our hero's arms, though it well-nigh dislocated his shoulder-socket, and, as it was, mangled his wrist and hand most cruelly. But, relieving his limbs free, he was up again in a moment.

His head, however, was giddy with the concussion, and when he gained his feet it was to stagger feebly on, his eyes blinded, and a stream of blood gushing from his nostrils. Yet he still mustered strength to tear the belt-buckle from his mouth, and shift the bandage below his chin, all the time pressing on with all the speed he could command.

Matteo and his companion had reached the gully just as the Yankee rose, and soon they were within half a dozen rods of his back. Neither dared discharge his carbine, lest its report should warn the not distant farm residents before their Captain's signal of attack. But poor Penfret was already tottering in his pace and in a few more paces he heard the curses of Matteo close behind him. With a last effort, he wheeled about, and raising his right foot, planted a well-directed kick against the stomach of his pursuer. Matteo recoiled backward, but at the same moment the Yankee had sent him, like the dead, in the middle of the road.

Our adventurer's head now seemed inclined to have a knock. The kindest brigand dared not pass his comrade, and planted his foot upon the prostrate man, while Matteo, bent almost double by the

kick he had received, staggered forward, and raised his knife to plunge it in our hero's heart.

"No, comrade," said the other, pushing back the arm of the furious Matteo, "not yet. Remember our Captain's orders. Let the poor devil say his prayers."

"Curse him! he shall die at once!" cried Matteo.

"No! he's a brave fellow. His soul must be saved! Here, Senor, kiss the cross!" said the lieutenant, raising the Yankee's head, and placing a cross-bellied dagger to his lips. "Say your prayers quickly, before you die."

Pomfret strove to raise himself, his eyes glancing from one to another of the frowning faces of his captors. The brigand, shifting his arms from the breast of his prisoner, allowed him to obtain a kneeling position, while the revengeful Matteo stood scowling by, ready to strike his knife in the bosom of his doomed enemy, as soon as his brief prayer should be ended. At this moment, two men sprang promptly from the wood into the road.

Matteo and his comrade leveled their carbines, but lowered the muzzles immediately, on recognizing the new-comers. Pomfret also recognized the faces of the braves who now advanced. They were the brigands from whom he had escaped—Lopez and Pedro.

These two, drawing near, exchanged salutations with their comrades; and Pedro, the black Mexican, yelled with delight as he beheld the Yankee's situation.

"Alas! the spy! Hang him, Thomas—hang him up, at once!" he cried, stopping his arm, and making frightful faces at Pomfret.

"Well thought of, had we a rope."

"That have I, comrade," said Pedro, producing from beneath his jacket a long coil, or lasso, such as the brigands sometimes had occasion to use in their marauding excursions.

"Do it! but I must be the executioner," growled Matteo, with a savage laugh.

"Up with him, then, at once," said Pedro.

"Let him say his prayers," interposed Thomas.

"Curse him! he has had time enough," answered Matteo.

"We must obey our Captain's orders," said Thomas, who was a solid Irishman, and acted as a sort of orderly sergeant to the robber band.

"Quick, Senor! pray, and be hanged!"

Pomfret had given up all hopes of escape at the instant he recognized the features of Pedro. So now, closing his eyes, he murmured a short prayer, while the robber Thomas adjusted the noose around his neck, and threw the other end of the lasso across an overhanging branch.

Matteo and Pedro looked on in greedy anticipation of revenge.

CHAPTER VI.

PLOTS AND COUNTERPLOTS.

" 'Tis a bright night for a ride ! " quoth Don Ferrarito Nunez, he mounted his horse at the barrack-gate, in order to attend his friend La Vega on their romantic expedition to the house of Martillo. " But perhaps it might be as well for the success of our adventure if the moon would obligingly shroud herself in a robe of clouds, *amigo*."

" Bright or dark, I care not, so I succeed in my object," answered Antonio La Vega, reining his splendid steed, which charged the bit, and pruned about, as if impatient to bear his master at full speed to his object. " To-night Inez must be mine."

" Success to love and bravery ! " cried Nunez. " Are all our men prepared to march ? "

" Not only prepared, Ferrarito, but actually on the way. I was too impatient for the business to delay a moment, I assure you. They rendezvous at the cross-road leading to the ' Outlaw's Mount,' where we can instruct them as to our work."

" Good, Antonio ! love is the parent of promptitude."

" Say, rather, *revenge*, Ferrarito. I shall also have my revenge upon the proud girl."

" You are a strange fellow, Antonio, to talk of revenge and love in the same breath. Well, well ! Your revenge will probably end in loving the maiden to death. But let us away, *amigo*—the evening wears."

" You say well, Ferrarito. Let us go."

The two cavaliers spurred their horses, and galloped along the road for the distance of a quarter of a mile, when they reached another path, branching rather precipitously up toward the mountain passes. Both riders were well armed and clad in dark undress uniforms, which set off their compact and graceful figures to the best advantage. The moonlight, at this hour, was indeed most brilliant, and the excitement of a venture gave their nocturnal ride a quality which in romance to lengthen its attractions. On they went, up the rocky pathway, now reining in their horses to pass leisurely along the edge of a frowning precipice, and now using spur and whip to leap a chasm or broad gully.

They arrived at length at a small patch of woodland, including an area of open ground on which they found the thirty picked men whom La Vega had dispatched thither, drawn up in order, awaiting their arrival. A few words from the young commanders explained to the soldiers, much to their gratification, that their destination, instead of being the inhospitable " Outlaw's Mount," was the best fire they could expect would be the bullets of brigands, and

nothing but the house of a rich farmer, where neither hardship nor danger were to be found. The authority of their officers, with a promise of extra dollars and rations, satisfied whatever scruples they might entertain as to the legality of attacking a peaceful and wealthy citizen, as well as insured their profound secrecy in regard to the leadership of the affair. And, to tell the truth, it is very easy to satisfy a Mexican soldier of any thing you desire, provided your arguments be backed with silver and wine.

The signal was given to march, and the troop, leaving the wood, moved slowly and silently down the narrow pathway toward the valley, about the middle of which, as we have seen, was situated Mariano's house. Had they suspected, however, that Marini, with his terrible band, was already there before them, perhaps these soldiers would not have been so ready to obey their leaders in the matter of attacking a farmer's dwelling.

Don Ferrnlo and La Vega, on horseback brought up the rear of their troop, and arranged the plan of attack in such a way that both felt sure of its success. La Vega himself had resolved to scale the balcony beneath the Senorita's window, and thus obtain an entrance to her chamber. Then, by fair means, if possible, he was to induce the maiden to trust herself to his protection; and if she should be so unfortunates as to refuse, he was to wrap her up in his military cloak, with his bayonet at his saddle-bow, and, bearing her out to the balcony, drop her very gently into the arms of Don Ferrnlo Nunez, who, in the mean while, was to keep good watch for his friend without. The soldiers were to be concealed in the wood, and only summoned in case that old Marini and his servants should become aroused, and endeavor to rescue the Senorita.

Now this scheme, as the reader will at once perceive, was a very shrewd one, and, doubtless, our cavaliers had good reasons for anticipating its complete success.

They kept on in this order, though silently, till they had descended nearly to the lowest range of elevated land above the valley, and were in fact within a mile of the farmer's dwelling. Here they halted to arrange their further proceedings in a council of war, which, owing to their being no difference of opinion, was very brief. The result was that our two officers dismounted from their horses, which they gave in charge to a couple of soldiers, and placing themselves at the head of the troop, led the way through the woodland toward a point where they intended to cross, and gain the rear of Mariano's. Slowly and with caution they pursued their way, but any stronger force, our friends imagined, should discover their approach. Thus, at every step, they moved but, the object which they sought, the fair lady Marini, and the object which they did not seek, Marini's band.

Still, however, in approaching the point at which they proposed to strike, and toward the rear of the farm-house, La Vega's quick ear caught the sound of suppressed human voices; the wood was good for an hour, but not more.

It was at this moment that our unfortunate friend, Perfecto, re-

peated to himself what he anticipated were to be his last prayers on earth? Tomaso was tying a hangman's knot under his ear, and the others stood on either side, anxious to hold the poor Yankee to the bough above them.

And at this moment, as fortune would have it, the two Mexican officers had halted their troop within a dozen rods of the spot, and were themselves engaged, being concealed just within the wood, in overlooking the proceedings of the brigands, with a quiet determination to arrest the work as speedily as possible.

Accordingly, without the sound of a footfall, a dozen of the train of soldiers were brought in line with the rest, and placed ready, with their long daggers drawn, to advance upon the four executioners, as quickly as the word should be given; for like the robbers themselves, the military did not venture to use their firearms, from apprehension of alarming the inmates of the farm-buildings. Little and revengeful Matteo and grinning Pedro imagine, as they looked Tomaso in his hangman's task, that such neighbors were so near, to spoil their pleasant interlude.

"Up with the cursed spy!" muttered Pedro.

"Ay, give me the rope! He shall swing in a trice," growled Matteo.

Meantime, Pomfret had not uttered a prayer for mercy, or striven to change the purpose of his fierce captors. Whatever might be his reflections, he had remained silent, and now stood with the chord tight about his neck, and his enemies ready to draw him in a moment up into the tree branches. He felt the rope tighten and choke, and was conscious that another pull would lift his feet from mother earth.

But that pull did not follow; for at this juncture, Matteo, Pedro, Lopez, and Tomaso were seized by a dozen powerful soldiers, and, almost before they could utter a curse, were thrown upon the ground, pinioned, and held in complete subjection by the overpowering spectacle of a score of men surrounding them, all armed with carbines, pistols and knives, and apparently quite ready to use those dangerous implements.

Pomfret, not now more dead than alive, suddenly discovered the turn affairs had taken. He saw his captors started and pressed upon the ground, and felt himself almost miraculously saved from certain death. The rope now was still tight about his neck, the other extremity dangling across the tree bough. Pat looked bewildered, a moment, at soldiers and brigands; and then, without saying either "thanks" or "by your leave," he gathered the stick of the lance in his hand, and springing from the rock, leaped at the top of his speed through the forest.

What impelled this flight, Pat himself could never afterward explain. Whether his late proximity to death made him anxious to leave the scene of peril as soon as possible, or whether he decided to find new enemies in the companions of his old ones, is equally inscrutable; but this much is positive—that our Yankee never paused

in his flight till he had left the rock, gully and thicket far behind him, and was scrambling, faint and weary, up a rocky pass, nearly a league from Murillo's house.

The first impulse of Ferrado was to order the pursuit of the fugitive; but a second's reflection prevented him, as a single shout of the flying man, should he be followed, might alarm the whole household of the farmer, and defeat their plans. Consequently, he was allowed full scope of retreat, and the officers turned their attention to the four captured men.

From the arms and accoutrements of these, they were recognized at once as brigands; but to all the questions put to them they deigned not the slightest attention, maintaining a sullen silence, the result of Murillo's severe discipline, which in fact had contributed not a little to the security of the band; inasmuch as no torture nor punishment had ever forced a confession or one word from a captured robber, which might betray the interests of the band. This fact was well known to La Vega; so, after a few aimless queries the silent brigands were dismissed, and placed under guard within the wall, while the two officers, with a score of men, advanced toward the rear of Murillo's house, to carry out the contemplated abduction of Inez.

All this time, about a quarter of a mile nearer the farm buildings, Murillo, the brigand, was pacing up and down the shadow of the wall, waiting for the Sentinel's light to be extinguished, in order that he might give the signal of attack, and while his band surrounded the building, penetrate, himself, to the maiden's couch, and bear her away to his mountain retreat.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ABDUCTION.

The night was wearing, but its beauty was sublime in the quiet valley. No thought of youth who, late as was the hour, now sauntered slowly across the open fields toward home to the rocks near Murillo's house. The youth was a noble and graceful figure; his limbs elegant, but a lamping in his movements that betokened a light heart; and as the moon's rays lit up his muscular form, they revealed a clear brow, with red lips and ruddy skin, and eyes of earnest expression. Evidently a man that, in common speech, was characterized as being very good-looking. Indeed, the young artist, was a genius, and an artist in all his things.

The youth advanced lightly through the shadow, half past his gaiter to the wall, and standing at intervals a strong, and much interrupted, throng of people were talking the ropes. Indeed, with the rare exception of that night, the thought of Inez Murillo had been so strong, that it was no wonder that what was now composing an ex-

temper song, in which he compared the beauty of his love to the smile of stars, and the breath of flowers, exactly as all lovers have done from time immemorial. For—let poets and romancers say what they please—when one really loves, he can not help being common place, since every lover knows that all similes for her beauty must of necessity be flat and meager.

Nevertheless, Lorenzo continued to hum and thrum, as he drew nearer to Murillo's house. A patch of wall was between himself and the building; consequently he could not see the light glimmering from the casement of Inez, though he would have wagered his guitar that the light was *there*—because he knew very well it was always shining when he was expected. In truth, Inez Murillo was waiting and listening anxiously, too, for the first notes of Lorenzo's guitar, which, on moonlight nights like this, was always sure to be heard tinkling in a serenade.

It is a remarkable fact that all young ladies love serenades and, will get up out of their warm beds, and shiver for an hour at an open window, rather than lose one note of a song which they fancy intended for their own special ear. Ah! what multitudes of coughs, stiff necks and neuralgic affections proceed from this affection for serenades.

Yet Inez would never have owned that she cared a straw for Lorenzo's guitar, or Lorenzo's voice, or, for that matter, Lorenzo's self. Nevertheless, she always left her taper burning till the twilight began; and then, stealing near to the closed lattice, she would peep cautiously out, to see the young artist standing so patiently in the moonlight, his face turned upward, and his lips breathing forth the most musical language imaginable. Then Inez would hold her breath, listening until the last strain was over; and then she would watch Lorenzo walking away, till his form was hidden by the trees. And when all this was over, she would lie down on her soft, white bed, and, kissing the little silver cross which had been the gift of her dying mother, the maiden would murmur:

"Poor Lorenzo! he is a good soul!"

But, in spite of all this, Inez might have laughed, had anybody told her that she *loved* Lorenzo. And as for Lorenzo himself, he never dared to dream of such a thing. Nevertheless, our artist hummed and thrummed on moonlight nights, and the maiden would listen.

But little did the youth think, as he leisurely approached Murillo's house, on this particular night, that so many fine gentlemen were awake and watching around it. Occupied with the trivial matters which were coming to his mind, as he sang in the garden, the youth entered the little patch of wall that hid the garden's entrance, and, crossing quickly through its shadows, took his station, as usual, beneath the balcony, and commenced a preliminary strumming of his guitar—a sort of extempore prelude to his improvised song.

It was just at this moment, that La Vega and Nana, descending toward the farm house, had discovered, and were about to discover,

the hanging intentions of the four braves, which threatened so seriously the unfortunate Putnam Pomfret.

And it was precisely at this moment, likewise, that Marani cogitated, as he watched the light in the Senator's chamber, whether it were best to delay any longer his attack, had almost determined on giving the appointed signal to his band, when—*tum, tum, tum*, sounded Lorenzo's guitar.

"In the band's name, what is that?" muttered the brigand chief, starting at such unexpected music. "Whom have we here, now?"

As he spoke, Marani glided stealthily to a position whence he could observe the person of the unknown stranger.

A single glance sufficed to discover to the brigand that the newcomer was the young artist whose dextrous intervention had probably saved his life in his still unquarrelled with his rival, La Vega. This unexpected appearance took the robber aback, threatening as it did to derange his well-contrived plans. But Marani was a man of quick wit, and he saw in a moment how the presence of Lorenzo might be turned to his own account. He now divined the reason why the light had remained so long unextinguished in the senator's chamber: and so, forming his resolution instantly, he summoned two of his band.

"Jacopo," whispered he to a sturdy, Italian-featured man who appeared first, "see you yonder prisoner, with his lute?"

"I do, Captain."

"Well, Jacopo, if we stop not his music, ye may lose your booty to-night. So now, comrades, if ye can not capture the trim youth without blow or murder. Creep carefully along beneath the balcony, and muffle the young gallant ere he can cry '*prisoners!*' What say you, Jacopo?"

"It shall be done, Captain."

"Go, then; and look that ye be well covered by the balcony. I warrant she is watching him," muttered the brigand chief as his ruddy soldiers crept toward Lorenzo. "Ay, doubtless, yonder senator's daughter is peering in her eyes that she shall be Marani's bride, for all that!"

Scarcely then, Marani flung his arms out, and stood in the room while Jacopo and his comrades pressed forward to enter the balcony, and, rendered by the dark growth of startled trees that grew along the path, scarcely very soon to obtain a position whence they could easily spring down and secure the young artist before he could give the alarm or make resistance.

Lorenzo, however, was by no means so easily won and his resistance, though composed of such things as words, blows, and the like, had proved to be in his guitar in the most approved manner. The Senator, too, hidden by the folds of her erement, was listening to every note.

Tum, tum, tum, sounded the guitar.

But, hardly had the first note of the song from guitar and voice broken the quiet of the air, when both were instantaneously hushed. Lorenzo's mouth, open to its utmost extent, in the enunciation of his first sweet syllable, was suddenly closed by the rude hand of Jacopo, and with the quickness of thought our artist's arms were secured behind him, and a thick mantle wound round his head.

This unceremonious proceeding took poor Lorenzo so completely by surprise that he had scarcely time to recover his senses before he felt himself lifted bodily from the ground, and borne from beneath the balcony at a pace that showed his captors to be both strong and active in the business of kidnapping.

Murani, from his position, could see very plainly the whole operation, which took place immediately under the balcony, and, of course, was hidden from the timid gaze of the maiden who watched above. The brigand smiled triumphantly as he beheld the artist hurried silently around the corner of the house; and, shifting his short cloak to one shoulder—

“Now,” said he, “I will try my skill at a serenade. Methinks I can throw the guitar as well as the boy himself!”

Saying this, and directing another brace of his band to follow quietly, Murani crept along the hedge in the manner by which Jacopo and his comrade had gained their concealment. Arrived at the balcony, he took the artist's lute from the ground where the robbers had left it, and ran his fingers at once and boldly over the strings.

Inez, who had been somewhat surprised at the sudden cessation of Lorenzo's song, now bent her pretty head again to listen. But it was not, indeed, Murani's intention to waste his time in a love-song; for he had scarcely struck a bar, when he threw the instrument upon the sward, and with a light movement clambered up the corner of the farm-house, and swung himself softly on to the balcony. Inez, instead of hearing a repetition of the music, was startled the next instant by a low tap at her casement.

Now, such a thing as this was the last in the world that the Serenita imagined the young Lorenzo would do. To clamber up to a lady's balcony, and knock at her casement at midnight, was, to be sure, carrying a serenade a trifle too far. But, then, for the modest, timid, gentle Lorenzo to attempt such a daring feat, was almost too incredible for belief. She must be mistaken, surely! It must have been the wind!

But, no! There it sounds again—tap, tap, tap!

“Surely, Lorenzo must be crazy,” thought the trembling Serenita. “He can not think I would open the lattice. *Santa Maria!* I know not what to do. I tremble all over. What if my father should discover him? We should all be ruined!”

Tap tap! Once more the knocking at the casement.

“What shall I do? Mercy! if he be ill! Ah! but then he could not clamber up the balcony. No! he is not ill, surely. Ah, perhaps he has a present for me—a bunch of flowers, perhaps—that is all! Poor Lorenzo! still, I dare not open the lattice.”

Thus the maiden murmured, while her little heart beat violently, as if—which was indeed the case—it was half-frightened to death. But, some way or other, when a young maiden hesitates and deliberates between love and duty, she generously ends the conflict by doing what is very impudent; so Inez, after debating a minute longer, concluded that she would just open the lattice a little, a very little way, and tell Lorenzo he was very wicked, and must go away; that she was shocked at his conduct, and—a great many other things she thought of telling him, which, if she should do, would take at least half an hour to get through with.

“And then,” thought the poor girl, “if he has brought me a bouquet, I’d not take it, just to punish him for his impudence.”

Saying this, Inez gently unlatched the lattice, and opening it but a hair’s breadth, said, in a tone which she fancied very severe:

“What do you want, Lorenzo? Go away!”

All this time Marani was waiting on the balcony, in the shadow of the wall. When he saw the lattice unlatched, and heard the maiden’s low voice, he pressed hard against the blind, and with one effort forced it open.

Inez, who had expected to hear Lorenzo’s voice asking her to forgive him, and begging her to accept his flowers, almost screamed away, as she felt herself forced back, and saw the tall, dark form which stood in the balcony. But, before she could scream, Marani had thrust himself into her apartment, and thrown his mantle around her neck, smothering her breath in the way the brigands had silenced Lorenzo. Then the Spaniard felt herself lifted in the robber’s hands, and pressed closely to his breast. Conscious as he took her, and she knew not when Marani laid her through the casement and placed her senseless form in the arms of one of the brigands who waited beneath.

“She has fainted!” said the chief, hurriedly, as he lowered her. “Bear her gently to the next room. I will descend in an instant.”

The robbers received the maiden gently, and departed. Marani swung himself from the balcony, and was about to follow his men, when two figures emerged suddenly from behind the corner of the building.

“Look, Ferrarbo! By heaven! it is Inez—they are dragging her away!” cried the voice of La Vega—for it was he—as the two newcomers caught a glimpse of the maiden’s white robe, as she was borne away by the brigands.

“Let us follow, Antonio,” answered Nunez, drawing his sword, and following after the robbers, who had now disappeared within the wall.

La Vega was then told that since the robbery the tall form of Marani confronted him.

“But what is he?” asked the Spaniard, looking at the figure of the robber, who seemed to be interrogating him with the questions of a dying

"Ha! do we meet?" cried La Vega, setting his teeth, and pressing on his antagonist.

Murani's reply was the instantaneous discharge of a pistol, which he drew with his left hand from his belt. La Vega, blinded by the flash, though unwounded, retreated a pace, slipping on the green turf, while the brigand Captain, perceiving his advantage, threw himself forward upon his foe.

The next moment, a confused noise of pistol-shots and cries, mingled with a woman's shrieks in the woods at some distance, startled the forest-echoes, and then Murani whistled shrilly to his band, for his eye had caught the flash of soldiers' arms in the moonlight, and he knew that his men were attacked, perhaps by a far superior force.

At the same instant, La Vega recovered his footing and prepared for the robber's assault. A din of horrid sounds now rattled around the farm-buildings; curses, shouts and musket-shots mingled furiously together, and the household of Murillo, startled from their slumbers, flaked from the doors in wild alarm. Then suddenly a column of smoke rose from the gable of the farm-house. La Vega leaped up, as he made ready for Murani's attack, and behold the chamber of Luz enveloped in flames, which cast their blazing light upon the green sward. Then the two foes again crossed swords, and renewed the combat, while the cries of both, the shrieks of terrified women, and the shouts of soldiers and robbers, united to make the scene one of fearful interest.

CHAPTER VIII.

ZUMOSIN, THE PEON.

THE "Outlaw's Mount," with its waving trees and shifting shadows, shot up like a vast shaft from the plain; and on the summit of a peak, where overhung the feathery branches of the highest trees, arose a natural altar—a papat, as it seemed, from which a high priest of Nature might interpret her counsels to a kneeling world. Formed of the white rock of the mountain, time had carved on its bosoms of ages; and now, as the moonlight tinged its rocky sides, the imagination of one who beheld it might wander to some wild unseen Presence, bending from its throne, and vainly struggling with millions of the disembodied spirits of a perished race.

And upon the highest ridge of this sublime mountain, stood a figure, erect and motionless. It was that of a young man, who, with arms crossed on his breast, leaned down upon the summit of a rock. Beneath him grew, on either hand, a tree, the massive trunk and rounded form of an ancient tree, whose branches had been moulded by the lightning many years before; and the youth, sitting against the river-trunk, seemed unconscious of every thing save his own profound the deep draught of beauty which his soul was drawing from the glorious scene beneath him.

We left our friend, Patman Penfret, in the act of vigorously engaging, at once, both his friends and enemies, with a hunter about his neck, and sundry cuts and bruises upon his ill-treated person. Straight for the thickest parts of the forest our hero pursued his flight, seemingly resolved to place as great a distance between himself and the unmerciful slanders of Mr. Penfret's tongue. He stopped not for a bush nor a boulder, but, clambering over rocks, logs, and might else that impeded his course, soon had the satisfaction of finding himself, wearied out and gasping for breath, on a high ridge of rocks, stretching over a magnificent chasm, on one side of which he over-looked the river, and on the other, far beneath into the valley, stretched the long tract of forest through which his upward flight had led him. Here, completely exhausted, the Yankee lay, with himself prostrate on the ground, vainly but vainly beneath that high rock, now occupied, as we have noticed, by a solitary chamber of nature.

To the heated novel-reader it may seem abundantly romantic, while to the domestic or to the war, perhaps, appear a little tame, that we should have to go to a place as far away from our own country as Mexico, to find romance. But, with the physical certainty of contracting a cold in the joints, I believe, were we inclined to be simply romantic, we must go to the corners of this continent and to obtain a position to catch our prey. There is romance enough—terrible, strange romance—in the everyday walks of civilized life, to cast into shade all the adventures and aggressions of long ridges and adventures. More of the matter which makes the romantic *not real* is to be found within a mile of our own doors, than could be encountered in the wildest reaches of a foreign land. But the sun which enlightens our own hearts lights also these adventures, and we gaze far off for shadowy tracings, which are, after all, but reflections of the unnoted romance at our feet.

[illegible]

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It is not generally known that, although slavery, as it exists in the United States, was long ago abolished in Mexico, there still remains in that unhappy land a system of servitude far more degrading than the vassalage of the middle ages, and at best on a level with the worst forms of African bondage. This is the state of Peonage, which prevails more or less throughout the whole of Mexico, and by which thousands are held in the most abject and hopeless servitude, sold and transferred with the land they cultivate or the mines they work.

Peonage, though neither hereditary nor endless in the eye of the law, is yet as complete a system of slavery as can be imagined. The process is as follows :

If a Mexican has contracted a debt, and either can not or will not pay it, his creditor brings complaint before an alcalde or local magistrate, who immediately summons the debtor. Should the statements of the parties conflict, witnesses are called, and if the debt be proved, the magistrate orders it to be paid at once. If the debtor can not do this, he is brought out and sold for the amount of his creditor's claim, to labor for his purchaser at wages' service until such time as he shall have earned a sufficient sum to purchase back his freedom.

Under this horrible system he may be doomed to perpetual servitude by the simple decision of a magistrate. The corruption of Mexican courts is so notorious that an oath is seldom administered in cases of debt, and the creditor, if he be wealthy, is almost certain of a decision in his favor, from which there is no escape on the part of the wretch who owes. An appeal would but expose a poor and friendless man to new persecution, and, in the end, to a severe fate.

When the debtor is sold, and becomes a peon, he is removed to the land or property of his new master, and if he have a family, is provided with a hut, which is but one remove from a hovel, and with certain rations of food. To each peon is allowed two animals or about half a bushel of corn, per week, which is all the law constrains a master to supply; and should the peon require more for himself and family, he must procure it, together with his clothing, at his own expense.

But, as no one will furnish a peon with food or clothing on credit—he being what is called in law a *peon*—he remains, of course, entirely dependent upon his master. Consequently, being compelled to procure every necessary from the latter, he incurs constantly an indebtedness—every charge for food or clothing being added to the original obligation for which the wretch was sold, and of course swelling the debt at last to such an amount that the debtor, powerless to liquidate it, remains a bond slave for his natural life, and he, too, is compelled to sell his children in order to give the money of his stolen or otherwise lawless labor for the wages to which a peon is entitled, amounting to but the poorest pittance, or a mere nominal sum, while the goods which his wants necessitate him to purchase are rated exorbitantly; so, it may be easily seen that a man once reduced

the same of the other like this, will only, year by year, sink into more hopeless servitude.

As soon as this was said, Zincin, seeing that in the last of the crowd was supposed to be included some single individual, turned his eyes of expression. Far down, and stretching for leagues around, the youth could mark where, in the valley of the river, were the huts of people like himself, scattered over the scene of their compulsory labor, from which they could hope to escape only when their strength and their mental frames, and their power, were left vacant for a new slave.

The sort's heart began to heave, and he dashed his hand hurriedly across his eyes, as if to shut out some fearful vision. Then, starting back his arms, and flung his brow till the mountains were upon his face, as on the brow of a noble statue, he gave way to a burst of passionate feeling, and heled in the beautiful tones of the ancient Mexic tongue.

"*Spies of my fathers!*" he cried aloud, as he gazed over the twilight and valley and up to the bright heavens, with the sun going down. "I am here!" The position in which he had seemed to be, of the poet to give up his glorious pleasures was seized by such depression of his mind, and the moving of his hand upon his chest.

"What have I to do with my fathers?" he murmured, in a broken voice. "What has Zincin the sort to do with the brave spirits who have bled for us, and their country, and us, and what we have to do, rather than your long names to the list of the Specter-kill? What can I do with a sword like the sword of this?"

He waved his arm bravely, as he spoke, in the direction of the point of his sword, and then, dropping into silence, he resumed his fixed attitude.

The point of rock upon which the poem stood was the highest of a chain of abrupt eminences descending to a view of much of the surrounding country, as well as of the river itself. And now, as the sun's glimmering gaze fell upon the mountain side, at some distance below, it was attracted by a moving object which appeared at first lying softly from the rocks below, and by and by, mounting the stair-like precipices.

This object was no other than our friend Pomfrey, who, when thus observed by the solitary Poem, was in the act of making the best use of his momentary liberty, as much as, in the present, the distance between himself and his enemies.

Zincin watched the Yankee's progress, at a loss to conjecture what manner of person it could be who pursued a course so reckless, and up a point where, in broad daylight, it was at least perilous. When, however, he suddenly lost sight of the fugitive, and waited in vain during some minutes for his reappearance, the Poem began to apprehend that the man, whoever he might be, had passed his way, and that he was no longer to be seen. So, giving tighter the belt that encircled his limbs, and about his waist, he gripped

a short iron-tipped pole which had rested against the shoulder of one, and, leaving the old, desecrated world to sleep where he lay, he had last rested on the runner.

A few moments served to enable him to reach the patch of snow, where, overpowered by the pain and fatigue of the last few hours, the Yankee had fallen upon the ground, and now lay without motion or apparent life.

"He is dead!" muttered the Peon, stooping over Penfit's rigid form. "Dead! and there is one less of an accursed race upon the earth. But, ha!" he continued, turning the Yankee's face toward the moonlight "this is no Spaniard, it is an Englishman! Well, let him rot! They are all alike oppressors; let them perish like dogs!"

Thus spoke the newly Zarnozin, rising from the Yankee's side, and starting with folded arms, his lip curled with a bitter smile.

At this moment the report of a pistol sounded from the valley below, echoing among the rocky passes. It was immediately followed by a succession of quick discharges of musketry, accompanied with instant shouts and cries. And then from the woods below there sent upward a column of smoke and flame.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SPECTER OF THE FLAMES.

INEZ MURILLO, completely insane, and muffled in the bright flames, was hurried by her rude captives from the vicinity of the farmhouse. The two men who had, however, scarcely reached the roadside, when the noise of the combat arrested them, and they turned back. They discovered, however, that Murillo was not following them.

"The work is begun!" cried their guide, and disappeared like the flitting girl.

It had indeed begun. The soldiers saw, at a glance, the true condition of affairs, and immediately flew with a yell, and the good Moorish band leader, who, in Vega, had, seen, and felt, and seen, and heard, the same with four others, who were his lieutenants. Of their leader, and of his four lieutenants, the soldiers, the night were cut down summarily. Those who remained, and those who were for the mountain passes, so that only a few remained, and they saved the dead upon the ground, and the good Moorish band leader, and his four subordinates.

But, although the result of this summary execution, on the part of the soldiers, and the good Moorish band leader, was the same, the same around Murillo's mansion was a sad one. The mansion itself was were crackling and flaming beneath the quick fire, surrounded at a short distance by groups of soldiers, armed with muskets, and the

figures of wounded and lying men, struck down in the brief but desperate struggle. The soldiers made no attempt to arrest the progress of the flames, which moved on now beyond all human control, and the other spectators were occupied in frantic prayers and supplications, as they stood, dumb-stricken, on the square.

Manolo the Roman, startled by a few members of his household lying upon a bench at the edge of the wood. The old man had been suddenly awakened from his peaceful slumbers by the noise of the attack, and had escaped from his house only to find it consumed by the angry flames, and to fall, almost bereft of life, into the arms of a faithful servant. He was now slowly recovering from his swoon, and his first words were :

“My daughter—where is Inez?”

The terrified servants could only answer him by their averted eyes.

“Alas! Santa Maria! we have not seen the Santa!”

Manolo sprung to his feet, forgetful of all he knew, and with gaze fixed upon the burning walls of his house as if it might penetrate the telegraph of fire. Then, rushing wildly from the servants, the old man reached the gate of the building where were stored the treasury and treasure of his daughter's chamber. As he fell, his white hair streamed down over his half-blinded eyes.

“My child! Inez! my daughter!” he screamed; but no voice replied from beyond the rampart of flame.

“Tell me, oh! if ye be human beings, where is my child?” implored the poor old man, as he turned his agonized eyes upon the crowd of flames around him. “Have none of you heard my Inez?” he repeated, in wailing tones.

But none would reply. The women tongues of flame, which now leaped every wayward, appeared to mock at human impotence. Ghosts of fiery light flared in and out, and volumes of smoke ascended over the woodwork. The doorway of the Santa's chamber had fallen, and from the narrow passage issued but a feeble smoke, the light woodwork having been quite consumed.

But did the eyes of those who stood mock them? Or was it a muffled voice which appeared to sound from the interior of that chamber?

“Listen!” cried one to another, in whispered accents.

It was indeed a human voice, and it came, as if the one who uttered it were standing within. And presently, peering from the blackened recesses of the gate, a human hand appeared, the eyes staring forward. The hand glided from other parts of the building, and a slender figure emerged through fragments of the wall, and stood upon the street. It appeared from the light into the midst of the spectators, very slender with scanty hair, thin, but very courageously bearded Manolo. But the white-haired Roman raised himself up and said:

“My daughter, my Inez! where is she?”

From the struggling figure came a gasp, its arms were upraised

and a hollow groan, breaking from its lips, shaped a single word :

“Dead !”

Marillo sunk heavily to the ground ; while the wierd-like, blackened being, tossing its arms, uttered a shrill yell, and fell across the green-sward. The soldiers crossed themselves muttering *Paters* and *Aves*, as they raised the insensible Marillo in their arms, and heard, afar off, from the wood-depths a peal of maniac laughter.

But no one dreamed that the burned and scorched wretch, now flying wildly through gloomy forest paths, had seen, one hour before, that loving and light-hearted youth—Lorenzo, the artist.

CHAPTER X.

POMFRET'S FRIENDS.

ZUMOZIN the Serf, standing over our unconscious friend, the Yankee, and listening to the distant sounds of conflict in the valley, did not observe another figure advancing up the pass, until a drawn sword flashed before his eyes, coupled with a voice pronouncing the word :

“Surrender !”

The Peon threw out his arms, which had been crossed on his breast, showing by that movement both his humble garb and weaponless person ; whereupon the assailant dropped his sword's point.

“Who are you ?” demanded the new-comer.

Zumozin replied briefly :

“A slave !”

But, at the same time, he drew up his stately figure with an air that seemed to contradict the servile admission.

“What do you here ?”

“I learn that I am free,” answered the Peon, bitterly.

“Be ware how you sport with my questions. Know you aught of Martin's robbers ? Has no one passed you ? But why do I ask ? You are, doubtless, a spy, posted here by the brigands. Confess, instantly, or you die !”

Saying this, the stranger seized Zumozin's collar, and placed his sword-point within an inch of the serf's heart. But no sign of fear was manifested by the defenceless man.

“I am unarmed, as you see ; alone likewise. Were I a robber I should not be without friends.”

The other again withdrew his weapon ; but at this juncture his eyes fell upon the prostrate form of Pomfret, who remained, as he had sunk, quite insensible.

“Hut slave, as you call yourself, what is this at your feet ?”

“Sir, you ask what I can not answer. For a little while since, from the north-west, I beheld this man flying, as if from enemies. He came upon this spot, and I thought I to assist him

just as you yourself emerged from the pass. Whether he fell from your grasp is best known to yourself. Senor, you know and that I can tell, since that my name is Anselmo Zamozin, as yours is Don Ferrardo Nunez."

"You know me, then?"

"Only as a serf may know the peon cavalier who dashes past his hut on a prancing steed. Perhaps I deserve punishment for having named you effeminate, and coward, perdition, your war-steel and blood-steel! Ha! ha! Senor! thank of a slave envying a cavalier like Don Ferrardo!"

The soldier did not pass through his fingers as the Peon's will, but a scornful laugh broke on the night air. But, before he could reply, the man had stopped suddenly, and was lifting the head of Putman Poinfret.

"This man is not dead, Senor. He breathes—his heart beats!"

"Here is a flask of wine," said Nunez, producing a silver canteen. "Give the wretch a drink; though, if he be one of Marani's cut-throats, you will but save him for the gallows."

"He is a stranger by his complexion," answered the Peon, applying the officer's flask to Poinfret's lips.

The reviving liquid had an immediate effect. Opening his eyes, our Yankee looked from one to the other of the faces above him, and then, in his own language, murmured, feebly:

"Ingens ag'in, by thunder!"

"Fear not, have courage. You are in no danger," said the serf, addressing his countryman, Don Ferrardo, by addressing the stranger in English.

At the same time poor Poinfret started suddenly upright on hearing the familiar tongue. He stared at Zamozin as if incredulous of his own hearing, and then spoke feebly:

"Say that over again, please. Just you speak that ar' blessed language once more—now do." The tears gathered in Poinfret's eyes, and he began to sob. Two his bronzed cheeks. "Jerusalem!" he murmured, "I won't hear that sweet and natural tongue so long that I shall be wroth to meet you, stranger. Deed it is, now I tell you." Poor Poinfret, overcome by his feelings, here broke down.

"Who are you, Senor?" asked Don Ferrardo, while Zamozin's dark lip curved with a smile.

"Who be I? Well, stranger, I'm a free and enlightened citizen of the States—that's what I be."

"A North American—of the United States?" said the Peon.

"Yes, yes; and you're the first civilized fellow I've come across since I left Vera Cruz. It has no good to hear you talk, now. Give us your hand, I want to shake."

"But why are you, a stranger, here at this hour? Have you traveling-companions near?"

"None, indeed. To be sure, I've got friends—lots on 'em; and they'll be after me a yaller rollers with a sharp stick one of these days, now I tell ye."

"This must be the man whom Murillo's men were hanging not long ago," said Don Fernando, not caring the rope which still dangled from the Yankee's neck.

"To be sure I do," responded Penfret, comprehending the officer's remark. "I'd like I had a saint ran for life, anyhow."

"The man may be of use to us," mused Xamoz; and then, turning to the Peon, whose knowledge of a foreign language, as well as a singular demeanor, so little comporting with his station as a serf, now began to excite his curiosity, he asked:

"What said you was your name?"

"I am called Anselmo Zumozin."

"Well, then, Anselmo Zumozin, oblige me by taking charge of this American, if such he be, and let him be brought to our barracks when he recovers sufficiently. Can the man walk?"

"Well, I reckon," answered Penfret, whose strength and courage had been wonderfully stimulated by the soldier's wine; and rising as he spoke, he followed Fernando, who was himself preceded by the Peon. But they had ascended only a few steps, when they were confronted by a half-dozen rude figures, advancing at a rapid pace.

"Yaller-skins by hook!" ejaculated Penfret.

"The robbers!" exclaimed Don Fernando, raising his sword, as he scanned the dusky figures, and saw that they approached with leveled carabines.

"No, Senor, they are friends," interposed the Peon, calmly. And, advancing a few paces, he made a slight gesture, and spoke a few hurried words, which neither Don Fernando nor Penfret could understand. In a moment every carbine was lowered, and the half-dozen gaudy sentinels, ranging themselves on one side of the narrow pass-way, permitted the serf and his two companions to descend without hesitation, though to do so they were obliged to crush against the doublets of the brigands.

They kept on toward the valley, the Peon keeping the lead, until they reached the borders of the wood, through which now the glare of Murillo's house was distinctly visible.

"Here we part," said Zumozin to the officer.

"Not so. I must know more of you."

"I am a slave, and at my master's disposal, not my own."

"And who is your master?"

"Juan Garcia, the alcalde."

"Garcia! I know him well."

"So do I, Senor. Adieu."

"Stay. First tell me how it is you have authority over these brigands. Why did they not attack us?"

"That you may learn at some future time, Senor."

"Nay, you go not till I have—"

"If you wish to see me again, seek me among Juan Garcia's slaves."

With this speech, Zumozin turned abruptly away, and, before the

sollier could make an effort to detain him, dashed back among the trees. Don Fernando hesitated a moment, and then, bidding the Yankee follow, crossed the road toward the farm-house. It was at the very moment he reached the open space, in view of the burning, that the wild Fern of Lorenz, the artist, appeared emerging from the roof.

Narroz beheld the man's wild leap, and saw the aged Murillo place himself before him. Then he heard the mad laugh of the unhappy youth, and, darting forward, reached the group of soldiers and servants in time to see the stricken father of Inez lying senseless on the ground, while the timbers of his roof-tree, crackling and smoldering, fell over a surge among the fiery ruins.

The red glare which had illumined the sky and forest now faded to a dusky brown, and shadows began to creep over the fallen home of Murillo the Rich.

CHAPTER XI.

IMPRISONED AND HATED.

In the meantime, Inez, borne rapidly through the forest, had opened her eyes, and recovered sufficient consciousness to perceive her situation. It was her sudden sickness at this juncture which Don Fernando Narroz heard. But Gomez only wound the matter closer, and pressed her to his breast and the darkness of death.

The track near the farm-house was speedily lost in the distance, though the bright light, which shot up behind him, apprised the flying robber of the work of destruction. He kept on, however, with undiminished speed, till he reached a crevice, as if concluding along the trunk of a dead tree crossed to the outer barrier of the brigands' retreat. A dense solitary sentry responded to the watchword, and, passing him, Gomez soon reached the outer cavern, whence a light and scarcely perceptible gleam glared faintly out upon the darkness.

Entering this place, he deposited his exhausted captive upon a rough couch formed of the skins of wild animals, and called in a loud tone:

"Berta!"

The girl, to whom the reader already has been introduced, answered the summons. Emerging from the interior of the cave, she came toward the couch.

"Berta, make haste. Bring wine and refreshments for this lady. She is the Captain's prize. Dost not hear, child?"

"The Captain's prize! Where, then, is he?" asked the girl, quickly, the other pointing to her face and neck. "Where is Giacomo?"

"At the farm-house of Murillo, in the valley, whither I was strongly urged to return. Take good care of this lady, Berta, as you value

ne our Captain's favor. He is head over ears in love with her, by the mass! See to her at once, good child."

Berta passed, as if in a trice, and then withdrew to procure the refreshments, while Gomez paced the cave.

Inez meantime, remained motionless upon the couch. The moon was still shining brightly upon the open area before the cavern's mouth, and there a sentry paced up and down, his carbine gleaming in the silvery rays.

"Hot work, Gomez?" remarked this sentinel, eager for news concerning the expedition. "Were not the Captain's orders so strict, and were not one afraid of the fate of that poor old sot, Speltin, I would even leave my post, and go back with you. There'd be plenty of plunder—eh, comrade?"

"Don't fuss. And you'll get your share of it. Whatever we may say of our Captain, he takes care of every one. No one fires badly who obeys orders."

"Ay, Gomez, it's very well for the Captain to order; but it's hard to be cooped up in a cavern here so long as I've been, without an adventure to keep my pen and bright. I wanted to go to the valley to-night, but says the Captain, with that countenanced way of his: 'Stay at home, comrade. Your turn will come next.'"

"So it will," returned Gomez. "This booty of Murillo's will make us all rich, comrade, and we can dash away like granchees for a twelvemonth. Take my word for it, neither *monte* nor *pulque* can ruin us for a year to come."

"The saints be praised for that, at least," returned the sentinel.

Berta now came from the inner cave, bringing a flask of wine, together with some dried fruits; and Gomez, with a renewed injunction upon the girl to take care of the Captain's prize, loaded his carbine once more, looking curiously at theprising, and departed hurriedly from the retreat. The sentinel resumed his rounds, and Berta was left alone with Inez.

It is now time to describe this girl of the "Outlaw's Mount." In person she was below the middle size; feet and hands exquisitely small, and every movement graceful and lightsome as a young antelope's. Her round, compact waist and strongly developed bust, might serve as models of natural symmetry, and a charming oval face, fringed with glossy black ringlets, that fell in masses over her neck, was made up of irregular but expressive features.

No one of the band had ever seen Berta, without remarking the sunny smile that often broke all over her cave face; and every body said, in the future, that they would have said she dwelt, that Berta was the happiest child who ever wandered through a forest, or climbed high rocks like a wild kid.

The girl, after the departure of Gomez, stood, half on tiptoe, by the couch. Neither smile was on her lip, nor gladness in her eye. Her skin had become much paler than before, and swollen every vein into a distinctness, her large eyes blazed with intense though suppressed passion.

"Loves her!" she murmured, wildly clasping her hands to her breast. "What right has—"

She drew nearer to the couch, and, stooping beside it, drew away the cloak which concealed the features of Murillo's daughter. Then she arose to her feet.

"Ah! she must be beautiful; very beautiful indeed, if Murillo loves her. Oh, I have not look upon her face!"

The cavern was lighted by the steady glare of a lamp suspended from the rocky roof. An attempt had been made to give even this outer cave, which was a sort of vestibule to the robbers' retreat, some features of comfort, and even of rich elegance. On the rough wall were hung the skins of animals slain in the chase, mingled with crossed lances, gilded ornaments and naked swords, interspersed with numberless details of fetters, rosaries, and other ornaments which go to make up the truss of a robber's paraphernalia.

At the head of the couch was a narrow, arched opening in the rock, half concealed by a faded crimson curtain, hung up with discoloured fringe. This was the entrance to a private portion of the interior cavern, sacred to the use of the brigand chief, Murillo.

On the opposite side of the vestibule was a wider aperture, leading to a range of subterranean apartments, composed as kitchen, larder, armory, and dormitory by the band-witches who composed the band.

Berta pressed her hands to her forehead, and stamped upon the ground, as if to summon new determination; then she bent down once more, and slowly withdrew the mantle from the face of Inez. The light from the suspended lamp, falling upon the captive's countenance, disclosed its full classic beauty, more striking, if possible, from the unconscious and death-like insensibility of the unhappy maiden.

"Ah, Holy Virgin, she is beautiful—too beautiful!" cried the girl, with a sudden gasp, as she gazed upon the tenting lily. "Oh, she has stolen his heart from me, and I am lost, lost forever!"

Berta flung herself upon the floor of the cave, and sobbed bitterly.

Inez, partially recovering from the swoon, opened her eyes, and gazed anxiously around the apartment. A vague memory of the last hour's events wandered through her brain, but it found no tangible point whereon to rest, save the indistinct confusion of her seizure and the onset of the attack. Slowly, however, her eyes became accustomed to the place, and, raising her head, she beheld the open mouth of the cave, through which a portion of the heavens was discernible. She also caught the sight of Berta's sitting, and glancing downward, beheld the prostrate girl. A cry of shame escaped her lips.

Berta instantly started to her feet. Pushing back her dishevelled hair, she stood wildly before the captive's lighted countenance.

"What art thou, beautiful girl?" she asked, passionately. "What dost thou here?—and why, or I will kill you?"

"Alas! Sorrow, I know not how I have come to this place. I am most unhappy."

"Thou art a beauty. Thou art a sweet, sweet, beautiful creature

—you will be *his* bride—Marani's bride! And I am to be *rescued*! Woman, I will kill you!"

"Alas! you are deceived. I know not what you mean. Who is the Marani of whom you speak? I know him not."

And Inez shrank from the fierce gaze of the brilliant girl who had lifted her hand to strike her, as if she dared to strike her rival.

"What is your supposition?—I would have you speak freely to me. I know how you people speak when the hearts of men, and count it a fine thing. But you shall never be *damned* with! No—no—no!"

"Alas! I know not your Marani."

"It is false, oh, woman! Hear of it not! I told him at the gate of Murdo's house, and I told them that he was to be the husband of Inez! But that shall never be. You are here, and in my power, and you shall die—die, beautiful demon that you are, to steal Marani from me."

The low yet vehement tones with which the passionate Berta poured forth her speech, penetrated poor Inez with an ineffable terror. Nothing that this strange girl uttered was intelligible to her, and yet she could not help feeling that she was in some manner compromised with the Marani of whom Berta spoke.

But, as the flashing eyes of the speaker grew yet more angry, the captive motioned servants away toward the curtain, which, as we have seen, hung over the aperture near the head of the couch. Berta perceived the movement.

"Ha!" she exclaimed; "you would escape me. You would fly to your lover's chamber, and there await his return. But you shall not enter there! Never, *never*!"

Sitting her reason to the wall, she drew a silver-mounted pistol from her girdle, and pointed it at the bosom of Inez.

"Oh, mercy, mercy! do not kill me! Senora, I am innocent. What do you seek?"

"Your life," cried the frenzied girl.

"Do not kill me. In the name of the Blessed Virgin, spare me! My father would die!"

She was answered by a bitter laugh. As her hands, raised in entreaty, strove to protect her bosom, the pistol exploded, and she fell back upon the couch.

A volume of smoke rolled around the vaulted apartment. Suddenly, without the door, was heard the report of a musket, and immediately after, persons rushed through the aperture.

Berta stood, with the discharged pistol in her right hand, while her left was pressed against the breast of Inez. And as she withdrew her hand, and held it up in the light of the lamp those who had entered could see that it was crimson-stained.

CHAPTER XII.

WHO THE OUTLAWS ARE.

The approach to the interior of Marañ's land was a perilous one, nearly on account of the roughness of the path in many places, but more so, because of the lions, tigers, and other animals, which a hunter of the land only would be certain of shooting, and which hunters and always preserved the brigands in pursuit, even when, at times, some during expedition of the land and stimulated the closest search on the part of neighboring nations.

In some places the narrow path offered scarcely a foothold, and an adventurous passenger, if he dared to glance downward, would discover himself perched on a precipice, a thousand feet of chasm below him, in which roared the thick waters of a torrent boiling over its bed of rocks. In such spots as these, a single stone hurled from above would suffice to convert a vision of perils into reality. Indeed, the greatest caution was necessary when a solitary person attempted the ascent of such rugged heights; and, to guard against mishaps, the hunters fastened ropes from the cliffs above, which, being caught here and there as they ascended, enabled the climber to swing himself with comparative ease around the dangerous elements of slippery rock. These ropes were sometimes concealed in the thick fringe of the scattered trees which grew on the very edge of the cliff, but usually were thrown on from above, as occasion required, and care being taken up whenever the land was scene in their firmness.

So accustomed, however, were the daring followers of Marañ to scaling and descending these steep ways, that an accident had never been known, either by daylight or the less reliable beams of the moon, which latter were the usual guides of their expeditions. In dark or stormy nights no entrance ever was projected, as the risks in ascending to the mountain land were far too great to be rashly encountered:

It was on such moonlight evenings as the previous one, marked by the ascent and descent of Marañ's horse, that Marañ's followers went to descend secretly to the valley roads, attack and plunder a caravan, and then disappear, each with his booty, again to the high way, great secrecy, care to collect and divide the plunder under protection of the night.

Marañ's own chief ally, the brigand, Gomez, though encountered on the trailing land, and mounted to the summit. Let us now follow him on his secret journey to regain his quarters in the valley.

Like many of the land to which he belonged Gomez was of the Mexican race, deriving his origin from a union of the white inhabi-

tants with Indians and half-breeds. In no country are distinctions of blood and consequent variety of character more apparent than in Mexico. While the Guadalupeños and Creoles have enjoyed by turns the power and immunities of an aristocracy, the Aborigines, Mestizoes, Mulattoes and Blacks, in all their various shades, have always, since the Conquest, occupied inferior grades of life, as "hewers of wood and drawers of water;" or else, breaking from the restraints of a weak Government, have arrayed themselves against the laws, and uplifted, like Ishmaelite, their hands against all men.

The great passion in Mexico is gaming; the great pleasure, idleness. From the highest to the lowest, there is scarcely a man who would not stake his last dollar on a game of chance. Gambling is, indeed, the vice of the nation. Offices, emoluments, reputation, are the sport of the hazardous politics, which partake as much of the grand passion as does *monde* itself. The subaltern stakes his life in a plot against his General; the General risks his in a conspiracy, whose object is the Presidential chair. All ranks gamble, and are, by chance, ruined or enriched.

And to the spendthrift Creole or Godchapin, who rises from a gaming table without a coin in his pocket, or to the broken officer, who has lost both cash and caste, there is one way always left to retrieve their shattered fortunes, and this is what, in English slang, would be called "the road." It is a very easy undertaking to organize a temporary association for brigandage in Mexico. While there are dashing Creoles ruined in the capital, there are hundreds of poverty-stricken and discontented Mestizoes in the valleys and provincial towns, ever ready to embark in an enterprise which promises pay, whether it be robbery or insurrection; whether they be summoned to arms by a revolutionist's *proclamation*, or called by a secret word to some brigand's rendezvous. In most cases, the band thus formed has for its object the sudden surprise of a caravan, and, in general, when this purpose is achieved, the amateur freebooters disperse, to dissipate their booty at *monde*, the national game of hazard, or in drinking *pulque*, the national beverage. But, in not a few instances, well-ordered and desperate banditti have been known to set the Government at defiance for a series of years, and at length be brought to terms only by a general amnesty, and perhaps enrollment in the service of the State.

Such bands as these, however, are organized by degrees, and are composed of various materials. While a portion are men of the wildest passions and habits, who adopt the profession *con amore*, there are other portions made up of unfortunates, who have been driven by wrong and tyranny into rebellious opposition to the laws.

Among these latter may be classed the native Indian brigands, who, having escaped from a state of forced servitude, like peonage, or from abject poverty, find themselves outcast at once, and embrace a life which promises, at the best, a wild independence. Many of the Mestizoes, too, as well as the pure Indians, owing to the singular customs and superstitions of the country, and their religion is a

blending of Aztec traditional ceremonies with the observances of the Romish church.

As such, the Indians, unlike the Guahupins, or European inhabitants, and the Creoles, never obtained sway in political affairs, and this is true of them considered as a class. Nevertheless, many instances have occurred of pure-blooded Indians attaining to high positions in the State, holding rank in civil and military affairs. These, however, are exceptions inherent to peculiar individuals, and serve but to exhibit more forcibly the injustice which creates social distinctions on account of the accident of birth. Mexico owed, probably, as much to the Indian and Mestizo portions of her citizens, during the struggle for independence, as to any other class. Guerrero, indeed, the first of her actual Presidents, and one of the bravest of her patriot commanders, was scarcely more a white than a negro in the quality of his blood. It was evident therefore, that the inequality of political power is not the result of natural inferiority in the degraded classes, but rather the offspring of that injustice which repudiates all merit when opposed to prejudice.

A band of brigands, constituted of restless and ambitious spirits from all classes, with diverse notions and objects, requires, it may be imagined, some vigorous intelligence to control its operations, and not a little ingenuity to preserve the discipline essential to its safety.

Such a band was that of the "Outlaw's Mount;" and its chief, Giacomo Marini, possessed the qualities necessary to leadership in an eminent degree. Marini was neither a Mexican nor a Spaniard. His first breath was drawn among the Apennines, and his passions and inclinations were the offspring of an Italian education. Those who affected to know somewhat of his history, averred that he had once been noted as a terrible outlaw of the Abruzzi. Some said he had escaped the gallows by a miracle, or by the agency of magic. There were not a few who would swear that he was under the especial protection of the Arch-Deputy himself, who, for some hidden purpose, prospered all his undertakings. At the present time, however, it would appear that the band had deserted his *protège*; for Marini was a prisoner of his old enemies, with little apparent chance of escape.

Gomez lightly descended the rocky cliffs, swiftly skirting the narrow ledges, reaching, in a brief space of time, the shrouded valley. Though he no longer heard the reports of cartridges, he could still perceive, glancing faintly over the trees, the glare cast by the burning farm-houses.

Suddenly his ears caught the tread of footsteps rapidly nearing—a throng of warriors, and presently a number of his rebel comrades appeared. They were Indians of the pure breed, and not, like himself, a Mestizo.

"Welcome, comrades?" asked Gomez, quickly.

"To the mountain. We are beaten, and our Captain is a prisoner."

"Carried off? Marini taken? But he will escape. They can not keep our Captain in their dungeons."

"That may be, Gomez; but let us look out for ourselves, that we do not dangle in the market-place of Puebla. A curse on all murderers, and a double curse on those mis-begotten soldiers, say I. Come on, comrades. To the mount."

"Stay," cried the Mestizo. "Though our Captain be a prisoner he may be rescued. Who among you will return with me to the farm-house? Look! here are more of us, comrades all."

As Gomez spoke, another squad of the robbers approached with hurried steps. But to the Mestizo's proposition all turned a deaf ear. It was quite evident that the murderers were panic-stricken, and magnified the number of their foes.

"So you will leave our Captain to be shot or strangled, ah, comrades?"

"There's not much danger of that," spoke a young, oval-faced Indian. "The Captain commands assistance that we can not."

A murmur of assent attested the belief of the other Indians in this assertion. Gomez shrugged his shoulders.

"You'll bear me witness, comrades, that I desired to rescue our Captain?"

"Ay; but it is useless, Gomez."

"Very well, comrades; let us, then, return to the cave. The Captain may soon follow us—who knows?"

"Ay, who knows?" echoed the young Indian.

"I know that he will not return, at least to-night. The soldiers will take good care of him," said a new voice; and at the same moment a tall figure glided from the shadows of the wood.

Gomez grasped his carbane, but the Indians, with whom he was surrounded, recognized the new-comer by a spontaneous salutation:

"Ha, Zimozin, is it you?" cried Gomez. "You came among us, by St. Jago, like a ghost. Then, in an undertone, the Mestizo muttered: "These Indians are like spirits; you never know when they are at your shoulder."

"I saw from the thicket that your Captain was a prisoner," answered the serf. "He is in the hands of his deadly enemy, La Vega. As for yourselves, I would advise an immediate return to the cave, for a force will to-morrow invade the mountain. This night an officer of your garrison demanded of me the path to your retreat."

"And you—" commenced Gomez.

"I offered to conduct him thither," returned Zimozin.

"By St. Jago! What! betray us?"

"I offered to conduct him to the Mount," said the serf. "I did not promise to bring him back."

"You are a strange fellow, Zimozin. However, we will take your advice and seek our retreat. I am of opinion that if Captain Marti does not return, these copper-faced comrades of mine will escort you to our Chief—so I'll even begin to say now!"

This was said in a gruff tone, but the Indians who heard it seemed to manifest some satisfaction at the plan conveyed. But Zimozin said, haughtily:

"I am no robber—though I may be worse!—Alfonso!"

Then, turning on his heel, he departed as rapidly as he came; while Gomez and the rest continued their flight to the Mount.

The solitary sentinel who remained on guard at the cave, after Gomez had set out for the rancho-house, was extremely ill-contented with his situation. He could not help reflecting that it was more exciting and professionally respectable to be holding old Murillo's dollars and emptying his wine jugs—the occupation, as he firmly believed, of his distant countrymen at that period—than to be keeping guard over a cave and a woman, with nobody to converse with, and scarce wine enough to wet his lips. He leaned, therefore, upon his gun, and cogitated gloomily.

"Gomez and the rest are doubtless enjoying themselves, it is true," muttered the discontented robber; "and here am I, one of the bravest of all left to—"

What further the worthy might have said, was lost, for, at this moment, an unearthly cry pierced his ears, and before he could level his carbine, a man leaped from the thick woodland, and dashed full against him. The gun exploded in his hands, and at the same instant a pistol-shot resounded from the cave.

Almost at the same instant the open space before the cavern became a scene of the utmost confusion. A throng of fugitive brigands, led by Gomez, came rushing through the woods, while the unfortunate sentinel, wounded by the premature explosion of his piece, lay writhing with pain upon the ground. At the mouth of the cave, two of the robbers were struggling to master a wild-looking being, whose features and form were scorched and black with fire, and who uttered the most frightful cries.

Two other brigands emerging from the cavern, supported the form of a woman, whose bearded, gasping throat, and pistol with which she had wounded her rival, appeared the half-razed Berta.

In vain the strong-handed mountaineers struggled with the wild figure they had seized, and attempted to restrain him. He dashed to and fro with the strength of a madman, and bounding across the open area, sank exhausted upon the turf, his glaring eyes fixed upon the pallid face of Inez Murillo.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE TIGER IN A CAGE.

"Curses light upon the villain!—Why did they not cast him into the flames?" was the exclamation of Antonio de la Vega, who, with lowered and lowered head, lay upon his bed, listening to the relations, by his friend Fernando, of the last night's events, which had taken place subsequent to his own mishap.

"You forget, Antonio, that the brigand surrendered to our men, and was disarmed. He is, moreover, a prisoner, and incapable of doing further harm."

"Ay, indeed—a prisoner? Perdition! Had I not fallen under his sword, the villain should never have survived to be afforded the chance for me which a prisoner always has. I tell you, Ferrardo, this Marani will escape us yet."

"Impossible."

"Did you not inform me that Juan Garcia the alcalde had arrived, and that he is even now in the prison of this brigand?"

"I did—but of what consequence is that? The alcalde is no friend of the robber."

"No; but the alcalde, as a magistrate, possesses authority to order his removal hence; and should Marani have gold to purchase his liberty, an alcalde might be bribed. I have heard of such things, Ferrardo."

"But the law, Antonio! Garcia would hardly dare to tamper with justice in the case of so notorious a robber as this?"

"You talk of that of which you know nothing," answered La Vega. "Law in Mexico is made for the convenience, not the guidance, of magistrates. Juan Garcia, the alcalde, is the most powerful civil functionary within a score of leagues. Who is to call him to account, my good Senor?"

"You may be right, Antonio. But, trust me, I will keep my eyes open. For yourself, let not your mind be agitated by dwelling on our unfortunate expedition. Your wound requires rest, or it may become serious. Fear not that Marani will escape; for, by St. Juan! if he should attempt it, I myself will be his executioner."

"Stay, Ferrardo. Has it yet been learned concerning the fate of Murillo's daughter?"

"I have dispatched soldiers to scour the mountain. Marani's band is completely dispersed."

"And Murillo?"

"The old man is here, safe from injury, but inconsolable for the loss of his child. He believed her dead, at first, but is now assured that she is not. The woman whom we beheld carried off, and whom I pursued so fruitlessly, was, without doubt, your Inez."

"That's some consolation," muttered La Vega. "The proud girl will experience the tender mercies of robbers, in return for her rejection of a soldier."

With this reflection, the wounded Captain settled back on his pillow. Don Ferrardo left the apartment, proceeding to the barracks guard-room, beyond which was the prison, wherein Marani and other captured brigands were confined.

"Where is the Senor Garcia?" inquired Nancez of a soldier, on entering the guard-room.

"He is examining the brigand, Marani."

"They have been a long time together?"

"For an hour at least, Captain," answered the soldier.

"The devil take Garcia!" thought Nunez; but he kept the thought to himself, and, walking to a window, looked out upon the valley.

This military post, at which the two officers were stationed, was situated, as we have seen, at the head of the valley, and commanding a view of the surrounding country for a wide distance. It was upon the direct or "National" highway leading from the seacoast to the city of Mexico, and was so well chosen that it could be made a formidable barrier against the advance of an enemy.

Don Ferrarito could behold, stretching far beneath him, fertile plains, dotted with farm-houses, and broken by abrupt heights which, like the "Outlaw's Mount," were extremely difficult of access to unfatigued feet. Below, in the distance appeared the roofs of a well-fenced city, glittering afar beneath the rays of the sun. This city was Puebla, one of the strongest places on the route from Vera Cruz to Mexico.

Far off to the right, the officer could catch occasional glimpses of a river dashing in the sand-bars, and winding from the base of a lofty mountain many leagues distant; but, though he surveyed the wide expanse of valley, hill and plain, he took little note of the beauty of either. His thoughts were intent upon his previous night's adventure.

"A singular fellow, that Zamozin," said he to himself, as the recollection of his encounter with the Peon crossed his mind. "I can not account for his influence over the brigands—unless, indeed, he is one of them. I must see Garcia respecting this 'slave' of his; yes, I must question Garcia."

The young officer unconsciously uttered this last sentence aloud, and was startled by a voice at his elbow, replying to the remark:

"Well, what is your question, Captain Nunez?"

Don Ferrarito turned quickly, and beheld the person whom he had named—Juan Garcia.

Senior Garcia was a dark-complexioned man, a trifle below the middle size, firmly knit and muscular. His breast was broad, like a soldier's square, his head round and covered with short, crisp curls of shining black. His face was full, and he wore a heavy, arched mustache, beneath which his teeth glittered like ivory. His small eyes, piercingly black, were of that kind which never seem to rest, and while their owner spoke were dancing about, apparently scrutinizing every portion of the soldier's form and features.

Such was Juan Garcia, the alcade, who, smiling in a manner to display every one of his white teeth, repeated his remark:

"Oh, what would you question me, Captain?"

"Pardon me, Senior—it is nothing. I was merely thinking of—"

Don Ferrarito paused.

"I am all attention, Captain Nunez."

"Well, Senior, there is, in truth, no mystery about the matter. Have your young men's servants one called Zamozin—Anselmo Zamozin?"

"There is such a name. But why do you ask this, my dear Captain?"

"Oh, in reality, it is of little moment. On our last night's march I encountered this Zumozin, and—"

"Ah! you met him?"

"Yes, Senor, last night, as I said. He was—"

"Well, beware of him."

"What mean you, Senor?"

"In truth, it is not important; but this varlet's reputation is not good among his fellows. Therefore, my dear Captain, I can not advise you to any intimate relations with my servant."

The cool, contemptuous tone with which the alcaide uttered these words brought a flash of anger into the face of the proud young officer. Ere he could reply, Garcia, in a changed voice, exclaimed:

"Now, Captain, a word in regard to Marani, your prisoner. Was it not singularly good fortune to capture him so easily? The band has been considered very formidable."

"It is now, I think, scattered," answered Don Ferrando.

"Doubtless. But *apropos*, Captain, when had you warning of Marani's projected attack on the banner? Certainly your arrangements to defeat it were admirably made."

"We had no warning."

"Oh, indeed! that is more singular yet. Pray, then, how happened your soldiers to be in the valley at the point of time?"

"We—we marched there," said Nunez, hesitatingly.

"You will permit me to remark that your reply is rather indefinite, my dear Captain. Doubtless there is a little mystery about this adventure. However, I must not be too curious. But, before I depart, Captain, let me caution you to keep strict guard over your prisoner. This Marani is a dangerous fellow, take my word for it; and, as you and Captain de la Vega possess joint command, the responsibility now, of course, devolves upon you. Look sharp, therefore, Captain."

"But—pardon me, Senor—this Marani, what will probably be his fate?"

"Short, I dare say," returned Garcia, exhibiting his teeth in a quiet smile. "Indeed, I assured him of that, by way of consolation, before I left him. He is, without doubt, a great scoundrel, Captain."

"Another question, Senor, and I am done."

Don Ferrando paused again.

"Oh, I can answer that, I am sure," said the smiling alcaide.

"My niece is hungry and becoming as usual, and as ever the faithful servant of Don Ferrando Nunez."

The Captain's face grew crimson, and he turned his head aside, while Senor Garcia, with a twinkle of his black eyes, said, "Good-day," and passed from the guard-room.

When he had gone, the young man bit his lips, and muttered:

"He is certainly the devil himself—else how could he have guessed these thoughts? One thing is certain, however, he knows not how well this fair niece loves Ferrando Nunez, in spite of his teeth."

With this reflection, which seemed to relieve the Captain not a little, he turned from the barrack-room, and, calling a servant, ordered his horse to be immediately saddled and brought to the door.

When he is waiting for the steel, let us follow Juan Garcia on his homeward road through the valley.

CHAPTER XIV.

A BRACE OF PATRIOTS.

MOUNTED on a gayly caparisoned steed, the noble and led leisurely down the road, keeping to the left as much as possible, in order to avoid himself of the shelter afforded by wooden beams against the powerful sunbeams.

The house of Garcia was situated at less distance from the barracks than that which had been lately the residence of Mariano. It was surrounded by a territory, the settlement of territory and dependencies of the nation, which that of the father of Lopez was isolated by a system of walls and ramparts from any other habitation. Garcia was, in truth, one of the largest landholders in that part of the country, as well as an extensive speculator in mines, and a man, besides, who was reported to exercise no little influence in political affairs at the capital. Certain it was, that his occasional visits to the seat of government, together with mysterious interviews which often took place at his residence between himself and high functionaries of the State, were supposed, by those who allowed judgment in such matters, to be intimately connected with subsequent governmental changes.

The political character of the noble had never been truthfully developed. Many people recalled the time when he entertained Don Anastasio Huerta at his mansion, and was supposed to know more about that unhappy monarch's schemes than any other Mexican. Others were sure that Juan Garcia had been the mainstay of Garcia's administration, while others again were ready to wager that the worthy man was Don Lopez's State Agent's personal friend and adviser.

But, Juan Garcia was a being of the most impenetrable secretiveness, and whatever might be known, very little was known concerning his character or actions. He seemed with the same bland expression of countenance, and every day acknowledged that he possessed the same resources, though he had been an unrepentant supporter of the present government.

Don Garcia kept his steed, his hands carefully picking her way, as she descended the slope of the valley. The noble was apparently indifferent to her motions, for his steady and steadily resting eyes were wholly and quite unoccupied; so much so, indeed, that their glances

was filled to encounter the shadow which was thrown across his path from the figures of a horse and rider, availing his opportunity to reach a roadside tree, and the sound of the latter's hoofs, in a rapid, full tone :

"Ho ! Garcia !"

The alcade drew rein as quickly as if he had beheld the edge of a precipice, but recovering his self-possession immediately, exclaimed :

"Ha ! Don Mariano, here ?"

"At your good service, Señor," returned the horseman; "that is, if you will ride to the *hacienda* at once. I have but a few moments to spare, and have ridden far to meet you. Let us go forward."

"I was but this moment thinking of you, Don Mariano," said the alcade, quickening the pace of his mare to keep up with the stranger's horse. "Indeed, it was your business, General, that called me forth to-day."

"You have been to your station?" asked the stranger, in a soft tone of voice.

"I have, Don Mariano."

"Captain Antonio de Vega continues there ?"

"Jointly with Captain Ferrarillo Narez," replied Garcia. "La Vega, however, was severely wounded last night, and—"

"How ? . A duel ?"

"No, General; a skirmish with the robbers who infest this district. They assailed and burned a farm-house, but were repulsed by La Vega and a party of his men. Their Captain, an old brigand, was taken."

"Humph ! I passed the burned farm-house, methinks, on my way hither. But you remarked, Garcia, that you were out upon my business. What have I to do with these robbers ?"

"Perhaps much," answered Garcia, with his peculiar smile, his glittering eyes at the same time turning over the other's shoulders. "Perhaps ! These brigands are useful, sometimes—very useful."

"I understand, my worthy friend," replied the stranger. "Report has often said that Señor Juan Garza finds robbers of great utility at times."

"And so may Don Mariano," said the alcade. "In certain stages of politics, as well as commercial affairs, one need not be too choice of instruments."

"You are right, Garcia," returned the other, quickly; and then for a few moments he preserved silence, while the alcade rode by his side, carefully putting the neck of his saddle, though at the same time his bead-like eyes were covertly scrutinizing Don Mariano's countenance.

At last, suddenly starting, as if breaking a reverie, the horseman spoke :

"This brigand—who is he ?"

"Giacomo Marani."

"Ha ! He was once well known in Mexico. Don Lucas Garza and he were suspected of—"

"It is the same, General. Your memory is good. Don Lucas and Marani were known to be good friends."

"A dangerous man—this Marani."

"Dangerous as an enemy, but a serviceable friend, I should fancy, General. At least, Don Lucas found him such."

"And what do you propose, my good Garcia?"

"Yonder was the farmhouse burned last night," said the alcade, as they reached a point in the road from which could be seen the still smoking ruins of Murillo's mansion. "It will give you an idea of how Marani executes his work. Suppose, General, that we turn off toward the ruins. It is a place where one may converse in safety. These thick woods often have ears, and some things are as well kept secret."

"You say well, Garcia. Let us approach the place," answered he who had been called Don Mariano, spurring his horse toward the ruined buildings. The alcade's horse kept pace, and, in a brief space of time, the two had diverged from the main road, and arrived in the vicinity of the ruin.

It was now noon; the air was sultry, and a dead stillness reigned over the scene. The dependents of Murillo had sought refuge in a distant part of the farmer's possessions. The mansion and out-buildings were completely destroyed, nothing now meeting the eye but the smoldering and tattering ruins, where, yesterday, stood a peaceful cluster of houses. A few dead wreaths of smoke curled upward from the smoldering fragments; and, as Garcia and his companion rode around the walls, a breath of hot air came from the still burning foundation of the building.

But all was silent as the grave beneath the bright sunbeams. Nothing was visible but the tokens of destruction.

"What was this man's object?" asked Don Mariano, as he contemplated the scene.

"Ponder, don't fret," answered Garcia; "though I have learned that Murillo's slaughter was carried off by the band."

"Atrocious!" murmured Don Mariano.

"Very atrocious!" echoed Garcia. "Nevertheless, General, this Marani is just the man for your emergency."

"Well, then, Garcia," cried Don Mariano, turning his head and fixing a keen glance upon the alcade's face, "let us hear your suggestion. What do you propose in my emergency, as you term it?"

"First tell me, Don Mariano, if you have not the sum of twenty thousand dollars, *pro rata*?"

"For what I pay for them? It is true," answered Don Mariano.

"And to do this, you must have money?"

"That is equally true."

"Marani can give you the money."

"What for you? A living prisoner! Ah! as the price of his liberty?"

"Not quite so cheaply as that, General. Nevertheless, Marani

can procure you whomever you wish to replace in the military chest, and enable you to carry out your project, which I take to be—excuse me, General—a new revolution.

“You are sanguine, Garcia. Does not your zeal outrun your caution?”

“I am aware, General, that money wrought the Dictator’s fall. Your patriotism, Don Mariano, had a great deal to do with it, I confess; nevertheless, money—money was necessary. Now, then, as Don Mariano is out of the way, your patriotism is opposed to Herrera. More money (and patriotism, of course,) can run him. Do I make out my case?”

“You are Juan Garcia.”

“Thank you, General, for the compliment. Now to Marani. He must provide the money.”

“By what means?”

“Listen, Señor. In three days, a large and valuable caravan will cross the mountains. I have certain advices of its approach. The traders have been unusually successful, and a heavy amount of specie is in their possession—enough, doubtless, for your ‘enterprise.’ It is true, these traders possess Government permissions; but still, Don Mariano, will be of little avail against brigands.”

“I understand you, Garcia.”

“What is patriotism without money?”

“But are you sure of this Marani’s fidelity?”

“Entirely, though he must be allowed a fair share of what he earns.”

“You will stake your word that he does not betray us?”

“What has he to gain by such a course? No, General. In one week, or less, you will thank Juan Garcia for his foresight. In a month Herrera will—”

“What is that? I heard a voice!” cried Don Mariano.

“It was but a loose stone detached,” answered the peon. “See! yonder wall totters. Look! it is falling.”

As Garcia spoke, a fragment of the ruined *adobe* fell from a portion of the ruined house, and presently a mass of shattered masonry tumbled downward, burying itself among the tangles of smoking brush, and throwing a cloud of dust and smoke around them.

And the next moment, half hidden by the smoke and dust, the form of a man was clearly visible, and then disappeared behind the ruins. Garcia and his companion started forward, uttered exclamations, and then groped around the corner of the house.

But no living man was there, and all was quiet as before.

CHAPTER XV.

A PROPHET AND A FRIEND.

"I will win Garcia's inheritance, if there be any truth in woman," soliloquized Don Ferrardo to Nancy, percuting his steel to walk leisurely along the road, after a final gliding of a look from his quarters. "I can see plainly that the crafty noble is ambitious, and will, doubtless look early enough, when it comes to the point, upon a poor cavalier of fortune like myself. But the maiden—ay, she loves me, and, by St. James! methinks both of us are a match for the gentleman!"

Thus ran the Don's thoughts upon the name of Garcia. With the first suggestion of a young lover, he slowly pictured the consideration of all his wishes. Little could the light-hearted soldier of the opposition of a dozen Garcias so long as he felt himself beloved by the bright maiden, nothing appeared dear to his mind than winning the Donna Isabella.

"Forth! why should I not turn my own mind to politics?" remarked the young Captain. "Where there's a need for one, there's room for two," says the proverb, and I see no reason why Ferrardo Nunez should not thrive in that which makes Garcia fat. I will begin to school myself now, and take note of things about me; and it shall be hard, but, between my sword and my brain, I'll find where with to strike my enemy. Oh, for a right bloody war, where brave men might cut their path to fortune! War! ay, that's the key for him whose power is the right one; even the young officer, looking his horse skillfully over his shoulder, the expert stroke of the spear.

"War is indeed a great enemy," said a voice and voice at Don Ferrardo's elbow. The Captain drew back quickly, and beheld, standing at the roadside, the figure of Zoroaster the Sorcerer.

"Hail to us two meet again!" cried the cheer. "You are he whom—"

"Oh! where, Zoroaster, have you been?" said the Sorf, exulting. "Is it not strange that an immortal should watch a soldier against a poor slave?"

"In the land's eyes, Zoroaster, how know you of this matter? Are you a wizard?"

"Should I be Garcia's slave if I had power to release myself?" said the Sorf, laughing. "I am a wizard, Don Ferrardo, yet I can perceive that your destiny."

"I cannot tell what that is, for I am, profit I always the destiny of a poor man."

"It is said that now I read the hidden of your thoughts. I am—"

"An enemy of the poor, truly. So say Zoroaster. But you are wrong; for the poor is the only friend I have in the world."

"Ha!" exclaimed the Serf, with a vehemence that startled his hearer; "have they not, Don Ferrarito? What, then, was that *war*! which broke from your lips, as if it were the utterance of your wildest impulse? *War—war!* Was it not *that* you prayed for, Don Ferrarito Nunez? And is not war all that I have named—blood, crime, misery?"

The soldier was silent beneath the flashing eyes of the Peon.

"Such shall be your life," continued Zamozin.

"And with war will come, at least, honor," said Nunez, "Let the blood, the misery, be the lot of those who provoke and merit them—come what may, my sword shall be stained with no *crime*. But go on prophet of my destiny. When shall be those wars of which you speak? For, by the sword of the God! my own steel is growing rusty for want of use!"

"It will come—my, is here now!" answered the Serf.

"Forth! there is little sign of war, with good-natured, peace-loving Herrera at the helm of state," said Nunez.

"And Don Mariano Paredes at the head of the army," cried the Peon, sadly. "And Don Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna putting at Havana. And Don Lucas Alamán mixing pot-ours at—"

"Are you the devil himself?" interrupted Nunez, casting a look of intense curiosity upon the calm features of the Peon, who stood, with folded arms, on a slight bank at the roadside, so that his head was nearly level with that of the soldier on horseback. "You tell me you are a slave—a miserable bond-servant of the alcade Garcia—yet I have heard you speak different tongues like a scholar, and here you talk of Generals, Presidents, and *Ministros*, as if you had been a statesman all your life. In the evil one's name, what are you?"

"I shall speak no further, Don Ferrarito, if it pleases you not. But I predict war—*war*, that will plunge Mexico in mourning—that will depopulate her towns, ruin her commerce, massacre her sons, and outrage her daughters! Does the prediction satisfy you, Don Ferrarito?"

"And why, Zamozin, do you tell this to *me*? You surely talk not thus among Garcia's servants?"

An expression of alarm for a moment spread over the Peon's face, as he answered:

"Don Ferrarito, war is at our doors. Your path of destiny lies through fields of blood, through danger, and destruction; where the demon of battle rages with fiercest fury, there will be the soldier Nunez; and beside him, will be—"

"Who?" grasped the young officer, strangely agitated by the doleful and weird words of his singular companion. "Who will be beside me?"

"Zamozin the Serf!" was the Peon's reply, almost whispered, but uttered in a tone which thrilled the very air around.

"Zamozin?" said Don Ferrarito, and he looked his companion with earnest attention. He scrutinized the expression of the Serf's countenance.

tenance, surveyed his manly form, and the singular grace which characterized his demeanor, and dwelt in recollection upon the curious traits that had thus far been developed in the man's character. He remembered, however, Garcia's words in regard to his servant, words which he could not but admit had been evasive of his own question. In the end, however, he was much puzzled as ever.

"Your speech is strange!" at length spoke Don Ferrar to the Peon. "How can you be beside me, in the fierce battles which you protract? Are you not a serf, and does not the alcaide Garcia control your actions?"

Zumozin's eyes rested calmly on the soldier.

"I obey a higher power than Garcia will—one to which Don Ferrarido Nuñez pays willing homage."

"How say you? I?"

"Even so. For in what would you not obey the lady Isabella?"

Had the Serf suddenly smitten the soldier's fire, the latter could scarcely have exhibited greater surprise than at this simple question. The blood mounted high to his face, his hands trembled, and he seemed for a moment to be in danger of falling from his horse, so strongly did the mere mention of his lady's name affect him. It was not, indeed, her name, but rather the lips which uttered it, that caused such emotion.

"In the name of heaven, what do you mean, Serf? Zumozin, what have you to do with the lady Isabella?"

The Peon's head dropped, and his eyes sought the ground.

"Alas!" he murmured, "what, indeed, have I to do with the high-born and beautiful lady?" Then, in a moment changing his tone, and lifting his head, "Soldier!" he said, in the deep, earnest voice which was natural to him, "I, a serf—a slave—have yet the soul to feel gratitude. The lady Isabella has been kind to her uncle's slaves—I pity my brethren, and remember kindness."

The last was uttered with a subdued feeling which touched the heart of Don Ferrarido. The Peon continued:

"Soldier, I have long known that you love my master's noble niece. Had I been your worthy of her, I would not be here now, to say to you what I have now learned—"

"Speak: what would you tell me?" cried the young officer, as the Peon paused for a moment.

"That she loves you!" said Zumozin, in a low voice.

Again Don Ferrarido started in his saddle, while his heart beat like that of a man if he had heard the blast of a battle trumpet.

"How can she? Isabella loves me? How know you this?"

"Soldier, it is true! I know not if the noble lady has yet confessed it to herself; but, on my life, Soldier, she loves you! Behold, then, why Zumozin the Serf has sought Don Ferrarido Nuñez. In gratitude to her whose kindness makes her very name worshipped among my fellow-slaves, I have sworn to devote myself to him she loves—to watch over his safety, to shield his life—if need be, to sacrifice my own in his behalf."

The lofty tone of enthusiasm in which this declaration was uttered, the flashing, yet sorrowful eyes of the Peon raised to heaven as he spoke, while his majestic form towered upward, and his arm was out-stretched, with all the generosity of Don Ferrando's nature. He leaped from his saddle, and, grasping the Serf's hand, drew him to his bosom.

"Noble Zamora!" he exclaimed, with tears gushed over his manly cheeks, "you shall be my friend, my brother. May God make me worthy of this devotion."

The Serf clasped the soldier to his heart, and thus for a moment these two magnificent men remained locked in each others' embrace. Strangers till this moment, one bond of sympathy had united them. The magnetism of true souls had made them one.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RACE FOR LIFE.

The nocturnal heats beat down upon the military station in the prison of which was now incarcerated the legendary Marani. The guard-house, a heavy fronted building, just within the embankments which formed the city defences of tragedy, was apparently the most secure spot to be found, inasmuch as its doors were shielded by tall and thick-leaved fig trees, beneath whose shelter were posted several soldiers, deterring them ever from any idea of war, gaming, and robbery.

"What think you, comrade, will be done with this robber Marani?" drewled a thick-lippeded of the yellow Mexican warrior, removing from his mouth a cigar which he had been lazily puffing.

"The guards, naturally," replied another, who remained a full length upon a patch of grass before the door. "This is common sense; though, for my part, I pity the wretch—he was always such a daring fellow."

"No doubt of that," said a third soldier. "Many's the night he and his band have ridden over our very noses, my comrades. To be sure, Marani was a gentlemanly fellow, and never made any violent assault when he could have done so without the slightest of a blow. I shall weep, most certainly, when they put his hands to him."

"So will our Captain, La Vaca," continued the first speaker. "It is said he has a great deal of sympathy for the poor fellow, and will never rest satisfied till Marani's doom is sealed."

"I shall weep for him," said the soldier, with a sigh. "There was a fine fellow, though in the end, and it was inevitable, it was sure, whether our Captain or Marani would be there."

"Nonsense!—there is that head of a Yankee whom the Captain, Nantz,

has taken into confidence so readily. We had better be mute before him, comrades."

As the speaker spoke, he pointed to the figure of Patrua Pomfret, which appeared at a short distance, approaching the guard-house from the quarter of the stream, with a careless and sauntering gait, as if the soldier were at the moment crossing a New England village green, instead of a Mexican plaza.

"The fellow is a spy," muttered the speaker addressed, watching the North American with no amiable expression upon his swart features. But Pomfret, as he reached the group, quietly drew a cigar from his pocket, and holding it out for a light toward the growling Mexican, remarked:

"I hope this here tobacco a'nt p'isoned. They tell orful stories of sich things among you yaller chaps."

Then, with a congratulatory grin, as he noticed the soldier lying at full length upon the grass, Patrua threw himself likewise beneath the shade-trees, and reaching out a handful of cigars, invited the others to accept them.

"Take a smoke! Fire up! Guess they're fast raters, for I got 'em of the Captain. That ar Captain Nunez is a natural-born hero, no mistake. He and I take to one another j'us' like kittens!"

"It's better to forgive, Senor, that you are not sharing the dangers of your friends, the brigands, instead of sacking our Captain's cigars at your ease," muttered one of the soldiers, grumly. "I'll warrant you that this fellow knows more about Marani than is honest—what say you, comrades?" continued the speaker, appealing to the rest.

An assenting grunt was the response, but Pomfret, although he perfectly understood what the soldier said, was not inclined to take umbrage at the remark.

"Yess!" at length drawled he, emitting a succession of smoke-rings from his open mouth. "It's j'es' as you say, yaller-skin! 'Twas kinder odd to me that the brigands got such an all-fired thimble. I tell you what, it takes a real Down Easter to come the giraffe over Ingens."

The degree of language in which the stranger indulged, compounded of equal parts of bad Spanish and tortured English, was not likely to convey to his companions a very lucid idea of his meaning; but, enough was intelligible to indicate the fact that the stranger was prepared for cross-questioning.

"How happened it that you were with Marani's band, Senor Americano?"

"How can I tell it without lying? I was taken prisoner."

"And how did you escape, Senor?"

"Gin 'em leg bail."

The Mexican was completely at fault in the endeavor to interpret the meaning of the Yankee, so he quickly changed the subject.

"How do you know our Captain, Don Ferrarito—eh, Senor?"

"He keeps nice cigars, no mistake."

"Are you going to enlist with us?"

"No, yaller-skin; see you dernel fust. I'm a free-born citizen of the States, and don't fight under nary colors but the stars and stripes."

"What may they be, Senor?"

"Dernel ignorant, don't ye know that ge-berious flag? I kinder guess ef you'd been down to San Jacinto, whar Sam Houston gin the Mexican's partick'lar Jessa, you'd a-seen that ar' flag flyin', and Santy Anny makin' tracks up an apple tree. Well you would!"

The Mexican smiled at the Yankee's vehement defense of his country's standard.

Ponfret proceeded to smoke his cigar in silence, returning the stare of his dark-featured companions with a glance of conscious national superiority.

Thus passed a quarter of an hour, the various figures remaining grouped picturesquely, their half-naked bodies bared to catch the least breeze that might stir for a moment the sultry atmosphere. To the mongrel soldiers, meanwhile, Ponfret was an object of peculiar interest, his protection by Don Ferrarito having generated a certain jealousy, which the Yankee's apparent shrewdness, and the evident contempt in which he seemed to hold them, did not diminish.

Within the guard-house, at the entrance of the passage leading to the prison portion of the fort lines, a single sentinel leaned carelessly against the wall, clasping with one hand his carbine, while in the other he held his heavy hat, which the heat had compelled him to remove from his reeking brow. His eyes were directed toward the open window, through which he could catch glimpses of waving woods and sheltered valleys, contrasting an idea of coolness and shade with the oppressive closeness of the fort. The grass-plot and trees before the guard-house, where his companions were quietly reposing, presented, likewise, a tantalizing picture.

But the sentinel, absorbed his reflections, whether of envy or not, was unconscious that a door had been noiselessly opened in the interior passage, or that a tall figure was stealthily approaching the spot where he stood. In an instant a strong hand compressed his throat, and dashed him, stunned and powerless against the floor.

Putnata Ponfret, mouthful his cigar, and the soldiers lying about the guard-house door, sprung startledearly to their feet at the concussion produced by the sentinel's fall; but it was only to behold the stalwart form of Muriel, the brigand, who grasping the carbine wrenched from the hand of the guard, now brought it to bear on the group. Startled suddenly from a careless posture, without arms, and crowded together at the guard-house door, the panic among the soldiers was complete. They stood silent for a moment; then breaking from the door, fled in all directions toward the square.

Muriel, with a laugh, sprang across the threshold, and gained the open space that separated the guard-house from the feeble barrier presented by the half-formed parapet.

Pemfret, rising with the rest, instantly comprehended the brigand's game. With a sudden bound, he leaped aside to a stack of arms, snatching, at the same time, to the Mexicans, to follow and recapture their prisoner. Marauder held his post, as he saw the Mexicans pause, and then hurry to arms. As he gained the highest portion of the embankment, he saw that Pemfret's piece already covered his breast.

"Surrender, Ingent!" shouted the Yankee. "Sur-render! or you're a gone sinner! Shoot ye, sure as you live!"

Maraud answered by almost instantly discharging his own piece. The ball struck Pemfret's gunstock and glided aside.

"Je-r-r-r-r-r-r! what a critter!" exclaimed the Yankee, as the brigand disappeared beyond the embankment. "But come on, gringos! we'll capture him yet," shouted the gallant fellow, as he dashed after the fugitive.

"Come back! You are mad! He is the devil!" were the confused cries which arose from the soldiers; but Pemfret was already out of hearing, in full chase of the brigand, who had diverged from the general into the labyrinth of the wooded mountain, kept on at full speed, though aware that he was followed by but one man.

Our Yankee, however, not fazed and raved among the Green Mountains of his native state; and to dash vigorously through a tangled thicket, leap a barrier of fallen logs, or bound over a sunken chasm, was to him but a renewal of boyhood's sports.

Maraud, on his part, relied in all the hazards of his wild life, upon his own chance of safety by in keeping within the covert of the forest, and he hoped that his own more familiar acquaintance with the valley and mountain would ere long baffle any pursuer.

"Halt, you scoundrel Ingent, or I'll shoot!" yelled Pemfret to the brigand, as the latter, after reaching the woody rock, dashed boldly from its protection, and struck in a direct line for the rocky sides of the mountain, where he conceived a narrow defile, leading by many windings to the outlaw's retreat. In doing this, he necessarily exposed himself to the aim of his pursuer, who was rapidly shortening the intervening distance between them.

"Halt, or I'll shoot!"

Maraud stopped suddenly, and, possessing himself of a heavy fragment of rock, dashed the missile at his foe. It was well aimed, but the Yankee Pemfret avoided it, and with a "Whoop!" brought his piece to bear upon the fugitive.

Maraud crouched at the base of the rocks, and with a sinuous motion, slipped himself rapidly forward. Confounded by this maneuver, Pemfret paused in his aim, affording the brigand time to reach a distance of fifty yards from his foe. Pemfret darted forward, following the windings of the path, but to all appearance the project failed, and he was a moment off all approach to the mountain. But passing that he passed the rock, when, instead of a brigand at bay, he found a long and tortuous pass, and the next moment fell to the ground under the weight of the robber, who, gaining a shelf of the rock, leaped from it upon his too eager pursuer.

Our hero fell, his head striking the hard rock. It was but the work of a moment for Marani to wrest the still loaded carbine from his grasp, and then, disengaging himself, to level it at his late pursuer. Pontfret's fate seemed, to himself at least, to be sealed; but not so decided Marani. Accustomed to form his plans almost instantaneously, he quickly saw that the loaded musket in his hands might aid his escape more certainly than the bar of his iron. He therefore contented himself with dealing a blow upon the Yankee's head, which laid him senseless upon the rocks. Then, shouldering his carbine, Marani sped on his course.

Thus Pontfret's headlong chase resulted only in mischance to himself. He lay upon the bare rocks, with blood streaming from a deep wound in his forehead, his consciousness completely gone. The sun glared fiercely upon him, and it was manifest that, if he should not perish from the loss of blood, he might finally experience a more horrible fate in his exposure on this unsheltered hill-side. But our friend's career was not yet finished, for, seemingly, Providence ordained his preservation.

The echo of the retreating brigand's feet had but died in the distance, when through the wood, in the direction of the valley, approached the tall figure of Zamozin, returning from his interview with Don Ferrando Nunez. The chief advanced with his usual firm stride, and was about to enter the mountain pass, when Pontfret's bleeding form attracted his attention. He recognized at once the foreigner with whom he had conversed on the previous night, after discovering him in a similar precarious condition. Stepping over the insensible man, he endeavored to arouse him to consciousness, but in vain. A death-like stupor possessed the stranger's senses, and his face was pallid as a corpse.

"The poor wretch is dying," cried the Peon. "He must be removed from this frightful heat."

Saying this, he raised Pontfret in his arms, with as much apparent ease as the latter would have lifted a rifle, and strode forward, though thus burdened, with a step as majestic as usual. He did not, however, follow the narrow pass for a great distance, but, diverging from the rocks, struck across the open plain toward another line of woodland skirting the base of a hill at some distance from the "Outlaw's Mount."

Pontfret gave no evidence, save by a faint flutter of his pulse, that he still possessed life; nevertheless, Zamozin slackened not his pace, till he had threaded the woodland, and reached an open tract at its other extremity. Arrived here, the chief paused a moment, and looked downward over the plain.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PFON ZUMOZIN.

A SCENE of varied interest was visible from the woolly height. A far-off appeared a beautiful mansion, surrounded by trees, and presenting from this point the several outlines of a charming picture. It was the hacienda of Juan Garcia, the noble, completely enclosed by a high wall, the rear of which was bordered by a graceful slope of lawn descending to the river's bank. The stream itself, at a distance of a quarter of a mile from the house, fell abruptly over a precipice, forming a succession of brown cascades, and falling, at last, to the river in its peaceful course, to lose itself in a deep and verdant glen. Thus the hacienda was hemmed on two sides by the water, the sloping bank at its rear, and at its right a steep, shelving cliff, forming a wall, at a depth of a hundred feet, it walled the river on its passage to the somber glen.

On the left of the mansion, the possessions of Juan Garcia extended far into the valley, covering from the river, which opened into the distance with a wide curve. Alternate breaks of mountain, forest and cultivated fields, and bearing marks of careful supervision and labor, marked the eye, and exhibited a sense of the proprietor's wealth, which, as it contrasted, a riot in the plain pastures, as in a sort of valley, a collection of huts, which were the dwellings of the poor, and the only animal which the land was naked and sterile.

Thus a contrast, standing upon the table-land above the hacienda, which seemed to be the two extremes of Mexican existence. The hacienda, enclosed in its high-walled and ornamental vegetation, with its great houses, its artificial avenues, its long terraces, and its many fountains, was a picture of rural luxury; while at a distance, the small group of desert huts, crowded with miserable huts, and surrounded by the barren fields of a scorching sun, denoted the poverty of the poor, and the painful effects of unjust, unrequited servitude.

There were no large hacienda huts during the barren plain; but the small huts were the dwellings of those hardy human beings who dwelt in them.

However small and poor the hacienda was, it was still a place of strength and power.

The hacienda was a place of strength, like a tower of fire, upon the plain. The small huts were the dwellings of those hardy human beings who dwelt in them.

There were no large hacienda huts during the barren plain; but the small huts were the dwellings of those hardy human beings who dwelt in them.

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the wounded Yankee in his arms, he descended to the barren plateau.

It was now some hours after midday, and the heat was at its greatest point. No sign of life appeared around the squallid huts which Zunozin approached. The tenants, save alone the children and infants, were now toiling in their master's fields, or in a factory which he had established upon the river some three miles from the hacienda. To this factory, a novel experiment at that time, the greater portion of the debtors who inhabited this village repaired at early dawn, there to toil till sunset, when, receiving their rations of food, they were permitted to return home to their miserable rest.

Zunozin was not subjected to this factory labor, but, with about two score others, Indians like himself, was charged with the keeping of large droves of cattle which Garcia pastured in the mountains, and which, reared for the annual markets, were a source of much profit to their owner's coffers.

The son, until he reached the age of fifteen, had been reared among the house dependents of the alcalde, and at that age, from some whim of his master, or heris, as many thought, of a fierce quarrel which arose between Garcia and the boy, had been thrust out at once from the hacienda to the mountains and placed in the degrading position of a herd-boy, among the half wild Indian peons. Previously to this, the youth had been thought a favorite of his master, and had enjoyed many privileges unknown to others of his class. In fact, during his early boyhood he had been allowed to share in the lessons which the alcalde's niece, Isabel, received from her tutor, a priest, who resided in the house of Garcia, and who, discovering the boy's aptitude for study, took pleasure in cultivating his youthful mind. From him, Zunozin had received the first rudiments of an education, which, after his banishment to the mountains, he had learned to cultivate with every means in his power.

To the priest, Herrata, indeed, the Peon was indebted for that knowledge of foreign tongues which had so distinguished the soldier Nunez. And such here as this was not the extent of the instruction which the boy had gathered from his clerical friend.

Padre Herrata was a patriot, in the highest sense of the word. Descended, on his mother's side, from the pure-blooded natives of the upper regions of Mexico, the priest inherited much of that defiant spirit which marks the Mexican who is antipathetic to the blood and influence of his European oppressors—a spirit impatient of the unendured restrictions which caste would impose upon the people. He had been born under Spanish domination, and lived to behold the foreign tyrants driven from his country; but, alas! had also witnessed the loss the distressed peasants of even her liberties, and to mark the greater outrage of Roman Catholicism's possession of his unhappy land, whose poor people, mired by their traditions, oppressed by their superstitions, were still, as ever, the prey of oppressors—ruthless, though poor, tyrants, who, by monopoly, extortion and rapacity,

amassed the wealth which properly belonged to those whose labor and strength had opened the sources to industry and commerce.

From this wealth the priest, as he recognized his country's history, and toward his race, Anselmo Zmazzin had early realized a kind of sympathy toward its customs, and he, moreover, had awakened in himself the seeds and impulses of which even the good priest was quite unconscious. Their political character or tendency, Zmazzin himself could not explain; but, their effect seemed to bring about a crisis, which, as we have seen, at the age of fifteen years banished the boy from his master's dwelling to the labors of the mountains, and the company of uncivilized men. This crisis was, as was already indicated among the priests, a quarrel with the abtule, in which the honest spirit of the lad had flared up so suddenly as to shake Gualafin's usual equanimity, and induce him to cut off his servant from all the advantages of civilized intercourse; while Padre Herrata, for the part he had taken in developing the boy's spirit, was likewise favored with a polite intimation that his services were no longer needed at the hacienda. Thus it was, that, in his fifteenth year, Zmazzin had become a herd-boy, and the priest, his teacher, had lost the favor of the abtule. What afterward had befallen the Padre Herrata, Anselmo could never learn, but he still cherished the liveliest gratitude for the good man's early care and instruction.

But to return to the rude huts of the village, one of which the sick lad just entered. It was of no larger proportion, and not a whit more comfortable than the huts which surrounded it, but it possessed the advantage of being unshared by any other debtor. In one corner, upon the brown earth, lay a few skins of oxen, which served for Anselmo's couch. A rude table and stool, with a few cooking utensils and dishes, constituted the remainder of the furniture of the dwelling.

But this had Zmazzin bore the Yankee. Placing him gently upon the couch, he proceeded to examine his injuries. The blow that Marcial had dealt was severe, but its direct force had evidently been parried by the haste with which it was dealt.

Zmazzin washed the wound and bathed the other bruises. In a few moments he enjoyed the gratification of beholding his patient's return to consciousness. Carefully he touched his forehead, and discovering that it was not so much inflamed, Zmazzin watched beside him until a soothing slumber began to steal over the sufferer's senses. Then, quietly leaving the hut, he took his course across the barren slope toward the river's bank and the deep glen, beyond which was situated the hacienda of Don Marcial, whither we will precede him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNCLE AND NIECE.

In an elegant apartment of the noble's mansion, adorned with all that a cultivated taste might covet, sit, or rather reclined, upon a silken couch, a female clad in a light blue robe, which flowed in graceful folds around her person. Through an open window a heavy atmosphere of aromatic odors floated into the room. The window looked out upon a prospect of nature's loveliness at her most gladsome season. The murmur of distant cascades came musically from the woods and from the low glen; and the fragrance of the flowers, cooled by a gentle breeze, wooed the lady seemingly into pleasant dreams, for she became still and thoughtful as if in a heart-revery.

Suddenly a man glided from the quiet glen, and reaching the corner of the hacienda, stood, concealed by the clustering vines, gazing through the leaves upon the unconscious dreamer. It was Zamora, the serf.

With arms crossed upon a breast swelling as if agitated by violent thought, the serf looked long upon the lady. At last, with a sigh, he shrunk back, and, drawing a silken packet from the folds of his coarse garment, flung it through the open casement.

The lady, startled from her reverie, beheld the clustering foliage shaken as by the wind. She rose from the couch, and gazed anxiously out upon the balcony. Zamora was closely screened by the foliage, and watched the lady's motions. As Isabel looked out, Juan Garcia appeared at the door of her room.

The noble stood motionless a moment, his restless glance wandering from his niece's form to every object in the room. Suddenly it fell upon the packet which had fallen upon the couch. Zamora beheld his master stand noiselessly across the floor, and passing himself of the packet, retire as quietly to the door, his departure, like his entrance, unheard by the maiden, who, disappointed in her scrutiny, now turned from the casement, and resumed her seat.

A frown overspread Garcia's usually smiling face, as, breaking the string which confined the packet, he commenced perusing its contents.

"SIXTY ISABEL!—let me behold thee but for one moment at early twilight, in the wood behind the hacienda. I have much to say to thee. FAREWELL!"

"Ha!" was Garcia's long-drawn exclamation, muttered between his clenched teeth, as he read these few words.

Crumbling the string in his hand, he passed for a moment to the door.

"It must be broken," at last he murmured, "else my schemes fall to the dust. My niece shall no longer trade. I must be speedy in that which I have to do."

Smoothing his ruffled countenance into its habitual calm, Garcia

thrust the packet into his pocket, and then, with measured steps, returned to Isabel's presence.

"I returned from my morning ride sooner than I expected, and have brought you something very sweet indeed, especially as I have something to communicate which will interest her."

The lady instinctively assumed an unconscious laughfulness of demeanor, but made no reply. Garcia proceeded:

"We have for the evening to-morrow morning."

"Indeed! It is somewhat sudden, Senor."

"Are you not weary of this seclusion, Isabel?"

"I can not confess so much. Quiet is not unpleasant."

Garcia's lip curled, and he seemed inclined to hazard a remark, which, on second thought, he repressed.

"It will be a gay season in Mexico, if rumor speaks truly. I anticipate great changes in the reign of fashion, if not in other reigns."

"Truly, Senor, you are freighted with gossip. What, I pray you, may result from the change of which you speak?"

"What say you, for mine of mine, to a court and royalty? Not like the court of my poor friend Iturbide, but a substantial—"

"And pray, Senor, what have I to do with all this?" inquired the lady, with a look of well-signed surprise.

Garcia bit his lips, and remained silent.

"Probably master of your important secrets, Senor," remarked the lady, in a careless tone.

Then, assuming an air of vexation, she continued:

"I shall be rejected when this reign of mystery, under which I live, can give place to something else, be it what it will."

"Your wish may be gratified sooner than you expect, my lovely niece," remarked the alcalde, dryly.

Isabel betrayed impatience.

"Well, I shall be ready to accompany you to-morrow, Senor," she said, lightly, turning her face away from the alcalde.

"Many thanks, sweet niece," returned Garcia, raising the maiden's hand to his lips, without appearing to notice her marked indifference to his presence. "At early dawn, if it please you; we will away."

The alcalde then, with a parting adieu, retired from the saloon, and Isabel, leaning her forehead upon her white hand became specially immersed in thought.

When Garcia had crossed the threshold of the apartment, he half turned, and raised his finger threateningly at the maid-servant Isabel.

"Pardon me," he murmured. "I will tell your destiny to my purpose. To-morrow you shall be far out of the reach of this villain-rer, Ferrardo Nunez."

The servant withdrew and heard all. He now glided from his concealment, and noiselessly threading the garden, penetrated to the park of woodland immediately in the rear of the mansion. This

woodland was not wild and irregular like that which bordered the mountain, but exhibited the works of the gardener's skill. The undergrowth had been removed, and the twilight shadows fell over smooth grass, trimmed to velvet softness by constant care, while the lower branches of the trees were trained in symmetrical proportion. Even the thick, spinous leaves of the alio, which upon the mountain grew in tangled and leafy confusion, were here separated and trained into distinct masses, from which the pyramidal clusters of flowers issued in luxuriant beauty.

It was a paradise, this country-seat of the alvilde Garcia. Such a paradise as would procure for the most unworthy of the human family—such a paradise as is denied, upon this earth, to the best and noblest of God's creatures.

This reflected Zum-zin, as he paused, and beheld another figure advance, whom he recognized as Don Ferrarito Nunez.

"Ah! Zum-zin, did you convey to her my letter?"

"It is to inform you of the result of my attempt to do so that I am here," returned the serf.

Then, in a few words, he related the particulars of the interview which he had witnessed between Garcia and his niece.

"But will Isabel see me? Will she depart without one word?"

"Behold!" said the serf, pointing, as he spoke, to a light form which at this moment appeared at the end of the walk. "Has not this been your trysting-place, Don Ferrarito? Don't not she come, though expecting not your presence. Ferrarito! be there! farewell!"

With these words, the serf grasped his friend's hand, pressed it to his heart, and then, returning to the Padre Herrero and the Yankee, he led them from the wood.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PRIEST AND A DESTINY.

PURMAN POMREY lay upon the Peon's mat, and looked on at Anselmo himself. The Yankee, much recovered by slumber, now exhibited some of his natural animation, replying to the serf's questions by a detail of the incidents which had led to his last capture.

"And the next time I hunt a yaller-skin through these bare woods, may I be hanged!" was the remark with which Pomrey terminated his recital.

"It was a rash attempt," said the Peon. "Mendez is too well acquainted with the forest: and had you fallen into the power of his band again, your escape would not have been easy."

"Spoken true," returned Pomrey. "The others don't owe me any good-will, that's a fact. I guess I'll take your advice, stranger,

and make tracks out of these 'ere diggins fast as possible. I'd kinder like to see that 'ere diggins Nantz, however. He's a good teller, I reckon."

"You shall hear your name to the capital, without returning to this station," replied the Peon. "The soldiers look with no favor on a yankee. I have more than one threat against you in yonder guard-room."

"You will?" said the Yankee. "How in time could I you hear what was goin' on up yonder?"

"I was there," quietly replied the self—"these drowsy soldiers like to know when the slave Zamozin listens to their reckless prattle. 'Tis not the first time I have scaled your rocks behind the barracks."

"And are you a slave, stranger?"

"Such an I hold in law," answered the Peon, bitterly.

"Well, now, you're a natural fool to be so. I should like to see 'em make a slave of Par Pezot, unless they chained up his legs with iron bolts. Jeras don't why don't ye make tracks? I'll stan' by ye, and see ye safe through. I will."

"Thank you," said Zamozin, with a faint smile as he noticed the Yankee's enthusiasm. "The time may come when Zamozin shall be free."

"The time will come," said a voice at the door of the hut, and turning sideways the Peon beheld the figure of a man past the middle age, with features of much nobleness, though the traces of care and suffering were legible in their many lines. He wore a coat of dark brown cloth, of a coarse texture, reaching below his knees, and bound by a cord about the waist. His head was covered by a round felt hat, which, thrown back from his forehead, revealed his countenance, wherein the beams of the declining sun were falling mildly.

Zamozin cast one glance, and then, with a burst of joy that seemed the welling up of long-pent feelings, sprung from the Yankee's side, and threw himself into the extended arms of the stranger.

"Padre Herrata!"

"Anselmo, my boy!"

Long and hard was that embrace on the part of the Peon and his father. It seemed like the meeting of father and son, so warm was their mutual clasp, so enlivening the expressions which seemed to break spontaneously from their lips.

"My dear father," said Zamozin, "do I again behold thee? I have prayed for this blessed hour."

Anselmo, the good God reminds us, no more to part till I have fulfilled a great trust committed to me. My boy, you must leave this place, and go with me."

"Whither, my father?"

"To Mexico. But who is your man?" inquired the padre in a hurried way, for the first time that they were not alone.

"A stranger, father, but, for him not, for he is not of the race of our oppressors; he will not betray our confidence."

"No, by thunder, that I won't," cried the Yankee. "Padre Herrata never plays false to a friend, ingen or not. And you're a true friend, for you've saved this critter's life more'n once a'ready."

Zumozin acknowledged the Yankee's expression of gratitude by an inclination of the head, and then, turning to the priest, remarked:

"We need fear nothing, Padre Herrata."

"Well, my son, I would have you set out at once with me from this place for the capital. On our way I will reveal much that concerns you. My boy, there is a God in heaven, who hears the cry of the oppressed."

"As you have often assured me, father," returned Zumozin. "I know not now for what purpose you would conduct me from this place. But, Padre Herrata! my earliest friend! my teacher, to whom I owe all that I am, I know that to obey your command is to follow the will of God."

"Enough, my boy. May heaven direct us both," said the priest, solemnly. "And now, Amen! so, in this, the hour of our reunion, it is meet that we give praise unto our Father in heaven."

Kneeling on the floor of the hut, in which attitude Zumozin likewise sank, the Padre Herrata lifted his hands, and joined with an earnest prayer. The wounded Yankee looked on in silent sympathy, while the deep tones of the priest's voice arose upon the air, and the golden sunbeams glowed in a halo around his placid brow. Juan Garcia had no power to check that fervent prayer in his cell's hut.

CHAPTER XX.

ZUMOZIN THE KING.

THE setting sun, disappearing behind the western barriers of the valley, cast a parting gleam upon that desert plateau, whereon were scattered the torban hats of the peons. The little hamlet was not quiet, as at midday, for its population, released from their daily toils, had returned to their dwellings, and were occupied in preparing their evening meals, from the scanty supplies allowed them by their overseers.

Here were collected men and women of a dozen different races. The degraded representative of European lineage, such as he with the vagabond Mestizo and the half-breed Indian. Many of these latter were, at the present time, engaged in apparently earnest sports; some casting stones at a rule target erected in some quarter of the village; others running a hundred paces, and others, again, chanting and uttering a general chorus, keeping measured time by beating sticks against the walls of their huts.

Altogether, the peon village presented an appearance of mirth, which might have impressed an unthinking stranger with an idea that its inhabitants were very contented with their lot.

Zamozin stood at the foot of his hut, his hand clasped in that of his rescued friend, Padre Herrata. Both looked upon the scene with emotion. Both felt the rackery of the apparent enjoyment which they witnessed.

At a little distance from them stood the Yankee, leaning against a corner of the hut. His head was still bandaged, but, save an unusual pallor of his countenance, he appeared to suffer little from the effects of his severe experience during the last twenty-four hours. Indeed, Padre Herrata's constitution was of the toughest nature, and his very frame capable of enduring and resisting as much hardship as that of any human. He had been accustomed to exposure and fatigue, and somewhat familiar with hard blows from boyhood, and his adventures hitherto, thus far, as woodsman, farmer, hunter, and sailor, had taught him to regard with equanimity such incidents of travel as resulted in his present familiarity with different phases of Mexican life. Consequently, Padre Herrata, on being made acquainted with the intention of Zamozin to depart that night with the Padre Herrata for the capital, had at once mustered resolution and strength, and declared his intention of accompanying them.

The sun had now totally vanished from the valley, and the evening was closing in. Zamozin called to a young man who stood near him, and who, by his complexion, was likewise of the Indian race:

"Tebayo, come hither."

The youth was at his side in a moment, and awaiting with evident deference the serf's further speech.

"Tebayo, summon together our brothers, and repair to the Sacred House as soon as the moon is risen. I will await you."

The young Indian made an inclination of the body, lifting his hand to his forehead, and answered in a strange tongue. Then, turning quickly, he mingled with his companions.

Zamozin exchanged a mutual smile with the padre, and beckoning Padre Herrata to follow, strode rapidly away from the huts. The priest kept by his side.

The Yankee, though able to walk, was still extremely weak, and suffering some pain from the bruises which he had received. Nevertheless, he contrived to keep up with the serf and his friend, though unable to take part in or comprehend their conversation, which was carried on in the Indian dialect, which is intelligible to very few even of the native Mexicans.

The serf strode on with his companions, for some moments after they had left the wood, without addressing a word to either.

At length the Yankee, unconsciously to preserve a long silence, remarked, in his own vernacular:

"Well, I rather think this here travelin' scrape'll about gin me a little weary of furder adventur. In futur', I guess I'll stick to my home, and let my old man 'round over the hull o' creation."

"I know not, my son, what our future may bring forth," remarked the padre, in pure English. "We are but instruments in the hands of our Heavenly Father."

"Jerusalem, minister, do you speak English?" cried the Yankee, stopping short, and staring at the priest with an odd mixture of astonishment and delight. "Wall, now, I reckon I've got on a sort of place, seein's how the hull of us can talk like Christians. Give me your hand, ole feller; I'm proud o' your acquaintance, now I tell ye, 'cause I believe you're a good man."

Saying this, the North American took the padre's hand, and would probably have proceeded to some livelier expression of satisfaction by a vigorous shaking of that member, had not a severe pain which shot through his body reminded him of the recent mal-treatment he had undergone.

"Come, we have a league to walk," said Zamozin, speaking now for the first time since they had left Garcia's wood. "Let us quicken our pace."

Saying this, the serf advanced more rapidly in a path diverging to the open country, and, in a few moments, the party arrived in view of an object which at once arrested our Yankee's attention.

The moon had arisen, and immediately before him Pontret beheld an immense building, whose vast shadow stretched far over the plain. The form of this structure was pyramidal, its apex nearly two hundred feet high, its base covering four times that extent of ground. It towered aloft, a mighty monument of the past, for it was a temple of the ancient Mexican race; it was the great House of the Sun, where, centuries before, the priests of this idol held their awful rites, while a hundred thousand warriors marched around, chanting the war-songs of their native land.

The moonbeams shined over this mighty pyramid, reflected back dazzlingly on the beholder's gaze. Pontret, impressed with awe at the grandeur of the pile, remained silent, as his companions passed along its base to the farther extremity. Here another structure, of similar form, and nearly as magnificent in its proportions, was visible at some distance, and around the two the Yankee could behold a circle of smaller pyramids, rising like tents from the face of the plain. At the same moment he became aware of a multitude of human figures standing half-shrouded in the shadows of the pyramids, and motionless as statues carved in stone.

But Zamozin, advancing before his companions, cried, in a loud voice:

"Who are these who stand between the Houses of the Sun and Moon?"

Then a response went up from the multitude of dusky figures, as if a thousand men spoke in one clear whisper:

"We are of the blood of Tlascala. We are the children of Zamozin, our king."

Hardly had these words fallen upon the ears of the astonished Yankee, and the no less surprised Padre Hermano, than a violent movement was visible among the multitude, and all at once, as if by a preconcerted signal, the dark throng closed around the priest and his companions. Then appeared Anselmo Zamozin in his natural

character. His rosy-tinted figure was drawn up to its full stature, his head thrown proudly back, until the light shone upon his brow. His eyes were fastened as with great thought.

"Children of Tlascala," said he, solemnly, "we meet to-night to recall the memory of our ancestors, to exchange our vows of friendship with one another, to swear fidelity to the ancient laws of our country."

A low murmur ran through the ranks of men, and with one accord they sank upon their knees. Zumozin remained standing, and his two companions could now examine the multitude who surrounded them.

They were evidently of the pure Indian race, and the dusky figures of many of them were relieved by shining ornaments of copper, while some carried in their hands spears and axes such as had been used among the ancient race, and which were probably heir-looms in particular families.

"Father," said Zumozin, speaking in a low and impressive tone to the priest beside him, "you beheld the fruit of your early counsels to the boy Aztecote. These whom you look upon are of the ancient races of Tlascala and Cholula, who fought first and bravest against the invader. Father, their blood flows in your veins, as in mine. But in mine runs the ancient tide of Tlascala's princes, and therefore, though I am crownless, and a serf, the children of Tlascala listen to my words."

"And you have awakened their spirit, my son?" asked the priest.

"I have spoken to them, my father, as you were wont to speak to the wandering boy in yonder hacienda. I have recalled to them the glories and the sufferings of our ancestors. I have revealed to them the prophetic traditions which yet promise peace and happiness to Aztlan."

"Ay, I remember," said the priest, solemnly. "The tradition that out of her ancient race should arise a deliverer for the oppressed. May God speed his coming."

"He will!" cried Zumozin.

Then, turning toward the Indians, who had arisen from their knees, he waved his hand thrice, speaking to them in the language of their Aztec fathers. They responded in the same tongue; and then, forming in a line, began to file with slow steps before the central group, each one, as he passed Zumozin, extending his right hand toward the House of the Sun, and repeating what appeared to be a customary formula:

"I swear to be true to Aztlan!"

When the last of the group had passed the Peon Prince, the king-like sank to the knees, bowing between the two pyramids of ancient Tlascala, and then Zumozin the Serf, advancing before his countrymen, lifted his arms to heaven, and prayed aloud in the Indian tongue.

Now, beneath the same clear moon that had, in other days, looked down upon the free children of that beautiful land, the thousands—slaves, their descendants, assembled to commemorate their old tradi-

tions. They had stolen forth from city and hamlet, from mountain and vale, to congregate before the sacred altar of their ancestors. And as the pale-faced stranger from a land of freedom listened to the strange accents of an Indian prayer, rising upon the still air, to the Father of nations, he felt that these serfs still hoped for liberty and longed for a day of battle against their oppressors.

Putnam Pomfret, the Vermonter, whose fathers had fought at Bennington and Tippecanoe, grasped the hand of the priest who stood beside him, and murmured his deep "Amen," to the prayer of a serf, for freedom.

CHAPTER XXI.

TWO ACTS OF A DRAMA.

ANSELMO ZUMOSIN and his friend, Padre Herrata, in company with Putnam Pomfret, departed from the mystic gathering which they had attended, retracing their steps across the plain. On all sides, divergent from the pyramids, the children of Aztlán were dispersing to their respective habitations. At the same hour three horsemen could be seen, advancing from different points toward the ancient ruins.

Zumosin's keen glance was the first to descrie the nocturnal cavaliers; and, as they drew near, illumined by the moonbeams, it was apparent that the serf recognized their persons; for, with a sullen gesture he stayed his companions.

"Yonder," whispered he, "ride those who come far that they may converse without fear of eavesdroppers. Consequently, there is reason that I should overhear what they talk about. Remain here, my friends, in the shadow of these ancient shrines."

Saying this, the serf pointed to several broken slabs of stone, relics of monuments with which the plain had once been covered; and then, while the priest and Pomfret cast themselves prone upon the sand, behind them, he proceeded to make a detour, in order to reach a point whence he could observe the approaching horsemen, who were now between the Houses of the Sun and Moon. Preserving a stooping gait, which camouflaged his dark garments with the thick verdure, it was not long ere the Peon gained a knoll, overgrown with rank grass, and strewed with the debris of some ruined shaft that had long ago crumbled. Scarcely had he ensconced himself here, when, almost simultaneously, the three cavaliers drew near at the base of the hillback, and the two foremost exchanged salutations:

"Don Mariano!"

"Juan Garcia!"

Then followed a few rapid words between the aboriginal and the other, which Zumosin could not distinctly hear, followed by the remark,

in a halting way: "I will question him myself. Ride you, Garcia, for a moment."

The commander of the horse, and getting round the black, tramping the horse round the black, then he who had been with the first man, turned to the third horseman, who was sitting in the saddle, and said abruptly:

"You are Garcia's man? I have a prisoner at La Vega's valley post, whom Garcia has released by my hand, Juan Garcia."

"You are mistaken, Sir! I am not myself."

"How! has Garcia deceived me?"

"No, Sir! Juan Garcia came to my prison, and remarked: 'Mariano, if you could make your escape, by knocking down a sentinel, and if you should thereafter desire to serve the state, there will, no doubt, be a good pardon made out for you.'"

"And you are speaking of my name-traitor Garcia! And you, sir—"

"I took the traitor's counsel, agreed to every thing, and after Garcia left the barracks, I followed him as soon as I could."

"And he sought for you of pardon and reward?"

"On condition of what I am to do in the matter of an expected *conduita* of treasure—"

"Do you know to what important events this enterprise may lead? Are you aware that great interests are involved?"

"I apprehend that my success in securing the treasure may involve much more. But, Sir, revolutions are so common now-a-days—"

"You are the soldier I want," interrupted Don Mariano. "Serve me well, Garcia. Mariano, and you will not be the loser. The action I want must be bold and prompt—first in stirrup and sword in hand. I think I would rather trust you than Garcia."

"I will serve you faithfully, General. But I must have your satisfaction."

"You shall have a commission as Captain in my guards."

"I am grateful, General; before three days pass, this *conduita* shall be effected, and the treasure shall be yours. Must I communicate with Juan Garcia?"

"No! I repeat to you at Puerto; Garcia will inform you in what manner, in three days."

"In three days, General."

"That is well! Now, we may join our detachments." Saying this, Don Mariano and the General rode to meet Juan Garcia, who was riding towards Puerto, all three galloped away over the plain; when, at a distance, Zoraida rose from her covert, and crept toward the General.

"Juan Garcia," said she to the General, "you have one slave to free."

General Mariano, a man of great courage and action, soon parted from his faithful companion, and took his way alone toward the neighbouring town of Puerto. He had thereby decided on the plan of his contemplated expedition against the *conduita*.

This *conducha* or caravan, it was well known, was now approaching from the east, conveying an immense sum in specie and bullion belonging to the Government, together with merchandise of the costliest kind. It was understood to be provided with ample means of defense and a powerful escort. Nevertheless, Marani was aware that, since his late disastrous encounter at Murillo's farm-house, the rumor had been extensively circulated to the effect that the band of the "Outlaw's Mount" was completely panic-stricken and dispersed; and this, together with the news of himself being made prisoner, was calculated, as the shrewd brigand thought, to render the advancing caravan less apprehensive of attack. On this account, Marani hoped to arrange his measures with certain anticipations of complete triumph.

So, after his parting with Don Mariano, the robber Captain pursued his way in deep reflection, until he had left the open plain behind him, and reached the environs of Puebla, where he paused at a point whence diverged two lonely roads, and entered a small *posada* or roadside inn. Here a man, who had been evidently awaiting his arrival, arose and saluted him. A mule, meanwhile, stood tethered at the door.

"Ah, comrade, you are prompt as usual," said Marani, in reply to the greeting. "What news from the Mount?"

"As you left it," answered the man. "And we are all ready for our new enterprise, whatever it may be. There is not one of us, Captain, but is ready to die rather than suffer ourselves to be so shamefully beaten as we were at Murillo's farm-house."

"Return, then, without delay, to our comrades. Say to them that Marani will be with them, ere to-morrow's sun declines, to lead them where we may retrieve our late misfortune. Let them be ready!"

"And the prisoner—the youth who is now with us. Gomez bids me ask what is to be done with him?"

Marani remained for a few moments in thought, ere he answered:

"The artist—I had forgotten him. Say to Gomez he may let the young man depart!" Then, turning aside, Marani muttered: "Yes, yes—what should I fear from this poor, half-crazed youth. Let him go. He is safe, unless he cross my path hereafter. Now, away, and by to-morrow's sunset, muster all at the valley pass. Let each man be well armed, and ready for hot work. The word is 'Paredes!' Away!"

"Paredes," repeated the messenger. Then, mounting the mule, set out toward the "Outlaw's Mount," while Marani, again mounting his horse, rode forward into Puebla.

"Ah!" said the brigand to himself, when his horse's hoofs clattered soon after on the pavement of Puebla's streets, "did these good people know that Marani was so near them, they would scarcely sleep sound to-night."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONDUCTA.

THE night on which the robbers threatened the caravan was one of beautiful and quiet moonlight; its beauty and peace shared by those robbers, who at the twilight hour descended from the "Mountain's Mount," and scattered themselves at intervals along the valley road, concealed by the thick growth of trees that covered it. The *conducta*, with its treasures, was now momentarily expected, and though the robbers were known to be well armed, furnished by government purchases, and guarded by military force, the followers of Maunah looked to an easy surprise and capture of their prey.

The opportunity of accompanying convey of government treasure, and thus adding their private strength with that of the military, is regarded almost as an assurance by the interior traders, while, in addition, single traders often time their movements with the progress of one of these caravans, in order to swell its numbers, and thus protect themselves from encountering greater security to all. It is seldom, therefore, that these large companies are molested by brigands, save perhaps, in periods of civil war, or when the military has been so engaged as to leave it without aid among the government escort. As a general thing, a traveler might journey with a caravan through the entire country, and (as in his personal experience could prove to the contrary,) set down every previous tale concerning *banditti* as mere moonshine.

The present, however, threatened to be a bold exception to the general rule of impunity: for there was a desperate as well as assured band of robbers who now lined the roadside, that held no good to the approaching caravan.

The position chosen by the robbers was one which, of itself, gave them no small advantage.

At a distance of about a quarter of a mile from the place where Maunah had found his headquarters, was a rocky hill, totally destitute of vegetation, from the summit of which the road over which the caravan must pass descended quite precipitously into a deep and narrow gully, densely lined with heavy trees. Beyond this gully was another rise, not so steep as the rocky hill just mentioned, but growing rapidly into a forest, and curving very suddenly into a sharp angle, which extended through the heart of the mountains. This pass descended at a sort of T, the other arm of which led down a steep slope to the left, and thence up to the military post commanded by the Viceroy; and it was quite as possible that a detachment of soldiers might come upon the caravan from the rear, as from the front, and thus surround the entire valley road. At this point, the robbers were so posted as to be enabled to fire their prey into the position which would place it most at their mercy.

The caravan, with all its apparatus, was at this moment scarcely a league distant from the assembly; and as it passed by, the pleasant sound of talking voices was blown to the listening robbers upon the quiet evening air.

And now at the moment when the caravan had almost passed out of the sight of the robbers, a number of the prominent characters were seen, as the travellers now saw them, moving their route. In this throng might be observed, as our Vermont friend would properly express it, "a saint sprinkled" of all sorts of people. There was a militer, in decorated hat and regimental coat, swinging a long tanger, and pouring out volleys of oaths, snatches of songs, and muttered grumblings, all, as it were, in the same breath. Opposite to him lazily marched a government soldier, tilting his cane horizontally upon his shoulder, while he conversed with a comrade upon the possibility of some new *promer* of obtaining a prospect of speedy war and spoils. Here was a priest, walking busily upon a fat mule, and there a stalwart trader, leading his horse by the bridle, and keeping a steadily eye upon every object within gun-shot. And the noisy costumes, the wild figures of mountaineers, the confused noises of songs, jokes, and oaths, combined to produce a scene worthy of Salvator's pencil.

All the party, as we have said, and the company was under the direction of an experienced mountain guide, who, chief in a good half militer, half soldier, rode a snow-shod mustang, at the head of the troop, keeping up a rapid conversation with one of the men, whose appearance and position denoted him to be the leader of the mercantile portion of the caravan.

The guide was a drop-headed, broad-shouldered, compact-built man, of about fifty years of age, with a sunken face, a restless head that he appeared able to turn completely round without winking a neck, and legs which clung as closely to the sides of his mustang as did the old man of the sea to the shoulders of Sabel. He gestaculated with one hand, and with the other grasped his horse's snowy mane.

The guide's companion was a fine-looking personage, of perhaps the same age, clad in a close-fitting brown and short mantle, with a cane sticking over his shoulder, and arms of various kinds reaching about his person. His countenance was a noble one, and of that singular cast uniting the clear northern blue eye with the black hair and eyebrows of southern climes. A shade of settled thought and the lines of severe experience gave solemnity to a countenance which more naturally had borne a frank and joyous expression. This individual was the Captain of the troop, under whose direction were the mercantile interests and private measures of the company.

A short distance behind these two, half-way between them and the leading military detachment, were two other persons, likewise engaged in conversation. One was a young man apparently scarcely beyond majority, who wore the gay uniform of a Captain of Louisiana

the same instant the mountebank dashed from among them, and passed him with the rapidity of thought; then the report of a pistol was heard, and then the young Linceo Captain fell dead from his saddle. The attack had commenced.

"Into line, men! Stand to your posts!" cried the merchant, in a loud voice, as he reached the first rank.

"That villain who lately joined us," said the guide; "it was he, the treacherous spy, who has slain our poor Captain."

As he spoke, a dozen brigands sprang from the mountain gorge, led by the spy, still riding his mustang. The old guide uttered a cry, as he recognized this man, and, drawing a pistol, leveled it at his head.

But the robber flung himself from the mustang, and, with a rapid movement divesting himself of the yellow blanket and ragged habiliments which had constituted his bold disguise, appeared at once clothed in full brigand costume. No longer hid the face and form of the brigand became visible, for his pistol dropped from the guide's nerveless hand, and, starting forward, "It is Marañ!" he dashed precipitously to the rear.

"It is Marañ!" was repeated by soldiers and hunters; and the brigands, profiting by their confusion, rushed boldly forward. But Gonzálo the merchant sprang into Marañ's path, disputing his advance with a lowered carbine. A bullet bore itself in the brain of the robber Gómez, while Marañ found himself in the grasp of the trader's iron arm, crushing his ribs together. With a yell he attempted to draw a knife, but to do this was impossible, for the merchant's grasp grew stronger with every struggle. Muttering a curse, he clutched Gonzálo's throat, determined to maintain his hold until his foe's man's breath should depart forever.

Thus the two antagonists rolled together under the mules, until they reached an open space, illumined brightly by the moon, when a sudden effort on the part of the merchant enabled him to free his throat, and spring to his feet. Marañ was not behind him, and almost instantly the two were again in conflict face to face.

But, in rising, the merchant's cap had fallen, and his broad forehead and marked features were prominently revealed in the moonlight. Marañ, confronting them, appeared suddenly to recognize some fearful likeness in those calm lineaments. His color fell, his glance wandered, and then, with a hollow cry, he turned and retreated, murmuring, as he fled:

"'Tis he!—'tis the dead—arisen!"

At this juncture a new arrival changed the aspect of affairs.

Leaping from the upper rock, and plunging, like a young lion into the ranks, the majestic figure of Zoroárin appeared on the scene. Behind him came Don Ferrnando Nuñez, with Perico and Lorenzo, bearing the banners and poles, with loud shouts. The brigands, who had hitherto been victorious, were now checked by this attack from an unexpected quarter; and before Marañ had time to recover from this sudden terror—could control or direct his companions, the entire band was in full flight before a rallying column of soldiers, peons and

triflers. The brigand chief saw himself again defeated, and as he turned to seek safety, he was met by the bright glance and armed hand of Lorenzo the artist, who exclaimed loudly to "Surrender!"

But Marani had no time to waste in combat. Dashing his slight antagonist aside, he leaped upon the old guide's mustang, which grazed by the roadside, and, striking his poniard in the animal's flank, rode bravely from the mountain pass. Lorenzo seized the bridle of Giacomo's horse, and dashed after the flying outlaw.

And then a wild race took place through the narrow passway, down into Marani's valley, across the plain, and through the outskirts of Padula. The mustang beset by Marani, was one of great speed and strength, while the merchant's steed, bearing Lorenzo, was not inferior.

Lorenzo, grasping a trooper's pistol, and bending on his steel's point, gave exact chase to the outlaw as he galloped after the flying mustang, whose clattering hoofs guided him through the devious streets. Suddenly, the hoofs ceased, and the pursuer, urging his horse, found himself turning the corner of an antique dwelling-house. He heard the mustang's gallop further on; but at the same instant his glance fell upon a figure crouching by the wayside. He checked his steed, and, throwing himself from the saddle, encountered the scoundrel Marani, who aimed a poniard at his breast. The rebel had resorted to one of the stratagems of his wild life, by dropping from the mustang, and permitting the animal to gallop away without him, in order to mislead the pursuer to follow his clattering hoofs. But Lorenzo's quick eyes had caught the gleam of steel, and by a timely spring he eluded the dagger stroke, and, in another second, leveled his pistol at Marani.

"Rebels! where is Inez Murillo?" demanded the artist, half choked with emotion. Muttering a oath, Marani sprang upon Lorenzo, but the latter's finger was on the spring of his weapon. A sharp report startled the street, and Giacomo Marani lifting his hand to his breast, staggered, and sunk upon the curb. At the same moment lights flashed in the windows of the old mansion before the gate of which he had halted, and people began to gather from all parts.

"He! a murderer!" cried one of the citizens, observing the fallen man and the youth who stood over him with a discharged pistol. "Unhappy youth, what have you done?"

"'Tis Marani, the brigand!" murmured the artist; and the cry was taken up by a score of pale citizens: "Marani the Brigand!"

And as the name of Marani was repeated, a woman's shriek sounded from a casement above. Then the door of the old house was flung open, giving passage to a female, who darted out, and sunk back to the ground, holding her head:

"The woman! Giacomo!—speak! It is I—'tis your Berta!"

The rebel opened his eyes, now flung with the approach of death. He gazed at the girl, and his forehead dropped on her bosom.

"Berta!" he murmured—"Poor Berta!—they—have slain me—at last!"

“ Oh Giacomo ! Giacomo ! ”

“ Berta !—kiss me !—listen !—you are—my—daughter ! ”—Berta !—pray—pray for your poor father—Giacomo ! ”

An expression of hopeless agony was stamped upon Berta's forehead, as she clasped Mariano's neck and pressed her lips to his, receiving her father's last sigh. Lorenzo turned aside with shuddering sympathy, and encountered another vision. He saw the open door through which Berta had descended, framing, as it were, the figure of a white-robed woman, who carried a silver lamp, whose rays revealed her pallid features. It was Inez Murillo; and Lorenzo, tottering forward, fell fainting at her feet.

CHAPTER XXIII.

JUAN GARCIA IN MEXICO.

JUAN GARCIA, the alealde, stood at the door of an ancient mansion in the City of Mexico, and, knocking at its outer portal, was admitted into the vestibule. To his low enquiry concerning the master of the house, an old servant answered by ushering him to an inner apartment, and to the presence of a man apparently of about sixty years, though but a few silver threads mingled as yet with the glossy black of his hair, and his forehead was smooth as a summer lake.

“ Senor Garcia, be seated,” said this person, waving his hand gracefully to the alealde. “ I was expecting you.”

“ I but a few hours since arrived in the city,” answered the alealde, “ having been delayed upon the route.”

“ Was not a caravan attacked near Puebla ? ”

“ So I have learned,” replied Garcia, with a sudden and but ill-concealed trembling of his lips, which gave way at once to a careless expression. “ The robbers in the mountains near my estate have been quite bold, of late. “ But,” he continued, changing the theme “ I believe your message, Don Lucas, intimated business of moment.”

“ You remind me, Senor Garcia. It was in regard to the young man—Anselmo—”

“ And what about Anselmo, Don Lucas ? ” queried Garcia, showing his shining teeth.

“ I confess, Juan, to have been somewhat troubled concerning this youth. ‘ He must be nearly of age.’ ”

“ Don Lucas,” responded Garcia, in a measured tone, “ if I am not troubled about Anselmo Zetaczin, trust me, you have no cause to be. As he has been, so will he remain.”

“ Ah ! if one could be sure of that ! ” rejoined the other. “ But he has the old blood in his veins, you know; and in these unquiet times there is no certainty that some powerful patron might not arise for him.”

“ Ay ! if the boy were master of himself or of a secret that can

cerus him!" said Garcia. "But you forget, Don Lucas, he is a serf, with a serf's duties only—to eat, sleep, and escape labor. Trust me, had I thought him likely to annoy us, there were many methods—"

"But should I?—I am—no—I am suspect—"

"What would you, Don Lucas?—that he be sent after his father?"

"No—no," answered the other, hesitatingly—"I trust all to you, Juan. Our interests are one; our lives depend on the safety of our secret. Nevertheless, it must be confessed, you have drawn largely—you have the lion's share of every thing, Juan."

"It is very true, Don Lucas, that I have my share of that which has been entrusted to both with my assistance. But you can not deny that I have earned all I claim. Pray, my dear Don Lucas, what would you have been without Juan Garcia?"

"It is very true; you were my friend, Juan."

"I thank you—since you, Don Lucas Gazman, could hardly have secured the reversion of Montagnone's estates, if the lawyer Garcia had not certified the deeds by his own testimony, as well as that of other credible witnesses."

"All of which was—"

"Simply this, that you, the administrator of Prince Montagnone's Mexican lands and titles, might establish a legal title to that vast property, and receive the guardianship of his infant son; so that you, Don Lucas Gazman, faithful friend and steward of the Prince, might lay your plans for the future—"

"Juan! there is no occasion to revert to—"

"Suffer me, Lucas—to my mood today. I wish to recall to your memory how Montagnone, inconsolable for the loss of his young wife—a pure blooded daughter of the ancient Mexican race—departed for Europe, leaving you sole administrator; how Lucas Gazman then took counsel with his friend, Juan Garcia; how the steel of our trusty friend, Gonzalo Marini, insured to Montagnone a long rest in one of the Arazzi passes; how the guardian of Montagnone's infant heir kept his precious charge so well that the child was never afterwards troubled, and is probably at this time a serf on the lands of Juan Garcia."

"Juan, why do you rehearse all this?"

"Simply, Don Lucas, to remind you, what you sometimes seem to forget, that through Juan Garcia you enjoy your share of Montagnone's princely revenues, and that, for this reason, Juan Garcia has a right to take care of himself."

"I feel no fault—I feel no complaint!" cried the administrator, laughing. "Your schemes are always good—always successful, Juan. And now let us speak of other matters—of your niece, the Spanish Infanta—how does she prosper?"

"Yes, my dear Don Lucas," responded Garcia, with a gratified smile. "She is prospering well, and may yet be—"

"A queen, perhaps."

"And why not, Don Lucas? You say my plans are always good

cessful. "Well, who knows, if Pared's shall prosper, and Herrera succumb?—who knows whether Juan Garcia may not reach the second place in the State?"

"But you have said, ere this, that you look not for the perpetuity of this Republic."

"Nor do I desire it. Mexico must have a solid government again. These unquiet races can be ruled only with an iron scepter. We must have a government that will insure your interest and mine."

"A monarchy!"

"Ay, Don Lucas! supported by the civil power, and controlling the army."

"Would you proclaim Don Mariano? I fear me he would soon meet the fate of our poor Yturvide."

"And so would any other Mexican. No, Don Lucas, the ruler who must direct, with a strong hand, the energies of this nation, is a youth of royal birth, whose election to a Mexican throne will be backed by European armies. Ere a year rolls round, such a ruler will be the husband of my niece."

"What say you, Garcia?—husband of the Señora Isabella?"

"Ay, Señor! Think you I play for *common* stakes? He who, through my aid, shall found a throne in Mexico, may well consent to mingle my blood with his dynasty."

"You are a daring man, Juan. I begin to have hopes of a monarchy. The Republic has had its day." Don Lucas arose, and took the abate's hand. "Let us ever be true to one another," said he.

"So shall we always be successful," answered Garcia, showing his teeth. Then, with smile and bow, the confederates separated, Don Lucas resuming his arm-chair, the abate traversing the outer hall, and descending with rapid steps the wide stair-case of Gazman's mansion. But when he reached the lowest step, a hand touched his arm, and a voice said:

"Señor Garcia, I would fain speak with thee."

He turned and beheld Anselmo the Peon!

"Señor Garcia, it is Zumozin, your serf."

"And what brings thee here without permission, Anselmo?" demanded the abate, with a stern look.

"Señor Garcia, I seek Mexico, without permission, because I desire to learn more than I could learn from your cattle on the hills. I have been dreaming of my past life, and would unravel its mystery. Can my master assist me?"

"Anselmo!" said Garcia, started, in spite of his habitual control of emotion, by the singular language of his dependent, "Anselmo, return to the *hacienda*, and you shall hear from me. There is a mystery in your life, and it is time, perhaps, you should learn what I alone can tell you. Go, therefore, and I shall await patiently my return to the estate. When I perceive you, all shall be made clear."

There was an expression in Garcia's eyes that indicated some hastily-formed resolution, leading to go to his Peon.

"Since George, I will always use my father's name."

"And, this is not a revolution; nor is it proper that it should be treated as one. I know not what your purpose may be, or what your part, or why you should fancy your cause true, or why you should be a leader of your companions."

Griffin's eyes were fixed, in a moment of time—his eyes, mean-
while fixed upon Zerkow's face, and to follow his thoughts. The
Pope, standing with folded arms, seemed equally intent to be, but met
his opponent's gaze with a steady regard, he replied, in an even voice:

"I never thought, my dear, that I was taught to look up to you as my superior," said Peter Warren, the teacher of your niece, "and that Mrs. Warren, the housewife, had a soul."

"Padre Herrata was an ingrate."

"I know, Sinner, that, in permitting me to become his scholar, the priest intended your destruction: I know that, when you bid me destroy my father, I saw words of distrust, or which you sorely grieved him. Yet, Sinner, I am grateful for the education bestowed on me, though it has been given, while hundreds of my fellows grow up in ignorance. I am grateful, Sinner, that my spirit was taught to rebel against sin, and to feel that chains bind both body and mind. I am grateful that, in spite of his lowliness, the blood of a kingly race runs in the veins of Zumozin."

"Ah! you have learned that—"

"Ay, so you think me—*what*, as I call you! When, driving me forth upon the hills, you made me free, at least, to *think*, I don't think of myself only; the boy Amos was less a slave than his fellows—why he enjoyed the light, and breath, and open air, while others suffered in their chains. Then it was that an aged serf, who has long since gone to his rest, suggested to me and said, 'Zamozin, I ask thy blessing.' I wondered why he sought the benediction of a boy, and he laid his hand, however, upon my naked bosom. 'There,' said he, 'is the heart of our Zamozin's race—the print of a flowering ear-tassel.' So, it was true; I felt within me that the slave-boy's blood was in the current which was fed in the fiery heart of Quetzimozin."

...with a constant and apparently
...It seemed ex-
...at night came to his
...a long list of
...that
...his father was
...to be
...

"I have already told you I intended to go to Italy," said
the woman, "and now I want to know what I intend to do."

"I am not," replied the Baron, changing neither his attitude nor the expression of his features, "all three days ago, I bore my

chains with resignation, hoping for future freedom. But I am changed, Señor, for I have since grasped a soldier's blade and mingled in the strife of men.

"You, Anselmo?"

"I, Señor García!" responded Zamora, starting abruptly back with a passionate gesture. "I was I who led my comrades against the robber Miramón. 'Twas I who saved the treasure of the State."

García's assumed calmness vanished with this last sentence. The Peon's vehemence, his knowledge of the expedition, and, more than all, his asserted agency in defeating it, penetrated the alcalde with sudden apprehensions. He felt that this conduct of his son was not the result of impulse, but of some subtle purpose, and he divined at once that he had to long undervalued Anselmo's character and abilities. Nevertheless, dissuading with habitual readiness he responded:

"You will not shame your ancestry, Anselmo, nor your father's name. But, return, I pray you, to our hacienda. In a week shall pass, I swear that you shall learn all that concerns yourself."

"And if you break your oath to me, Señor," said the Peon, gravely, "may I demand an unravelment of this mystery from the lips of Don Lucas Guzman?"

Now, indeed, the alcalde's cheek became ashy, and his glance shifted in terror. Zamora resumed in sterner accents:

"Joaquín García! I demand my father's name!"

"You shall learn it," answered the alcalde, with unnatural calmness. "To-night—this hour, since you will it! Follow me, Anselmo Zamora, and we will seek Don Lucas himself!"

With these words, García turned, ascending the staircase of Guzmán's mansion. Zamora followed him, and as the two disappeared within the building, two other figures emerged from beneath the balcony. These were Padre Herrera and the Yankee, Patricio Pineda.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE REVELATION.

GUZMÁN'S door was opened by the administrator himself, whose features exhibited surprise at the alcalde's return, and the paleness of his countenance. But García spoke speedily:

"Don Lucas," he said, after hastily closing the door, "I bring him a young man—a servant of mine—the Peon, Anselmo Zamora." Guzmán started, and grew pale as he spoke; but García continued: "His young man desires to learn his father's name. I endeavored to dissuade him from pursuing family secrets, but, his curiosity is insatiable. I shall, therefore, with your permission, proceed to satisfy it."

Uttering this, in a calm voice, Joaquín García suddenly drew a pistol

from under his vest, and discharged it at the Poet's bosom. Then, precipitating himself upon the young man, he bore him heavily to the floor. Don Juan started back, appalled at the abject's desperate action. A burst of light filled his eyes, and as it dispersed, he beheld the serf prostrate and bleeding, and Garcia's hand clasp-
ing his throat.

"O God! your love, O God! your love!" cried the noble, heavenly.

"I have been thinking of you — to the heart!"

“I have been fast! Since I came—to the front!”
The carrier then hesitated, and dived forward, while
Garth, seeing Zerkow’s head in the air, exposed his side to the
enemy. But the weapon did not descend; for at that instant
the carrier was dived upon, a blinding
light, and Peter Howard.

Patton saw with a glance the position of affairs, and with a hur-
rah, threw himself upon Don Luis, hurling him heavily against the
balustrade, where he held him by the back of the neck's throat. Garcia sprung
to his feet, confronting the assailants, but ere he could recover his
feet, he was again upon the scene. A file of soldiers en-
tered quickly from the passage, and ranged themselves behind an other
entrance. It was Herrera, the President of Mex-
ico.

100.

The shot, and Don James's shriek broke, as they met the quiet but determined gaze of the Republican chief; and the latter sought to conceal the danger with which he had threatened the life of Zamozin. The scarf, supported in the arms of Padre Herrata and the Yankee, was lifted to a couch. His wound, though bleeding freely, was not deep, and Padre hastily bound a soldier's scarf around his breast, staunching the dangerous flow.

Herrera first spoke.

"Why have you sought the life of this young man?"

"He was a very, well-to-do mine," was the sullen response.

• And he was the son of your friend, the late Prince

Montagnone? Answer me!"

"He was a poor man, and the son of a poor man," answered the abbess. "My mother's child died at

"I'm Lenny. Guess you know that. Managone's child died at
a child's death."

and controlled the slide.

"I have been here ever since," said I, "and I can't forget the friends I met here. Years ago, I met you here, and you remember me! You have been from

... You have no more
... You have no more
... You have no more

I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I will try to write to you more often. I have been thinking of you very much lately, and wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but I will try to write to you more often.

He did in Italy."

“The Prince”

Was a captain in the 1st Cavalry and was killed in Mexico under guard-

ianship of his friend, Don Lucas Guzman, to whom, likewise, he confided his property in trust for the heir. *Senor Guzman am I right?* ”

“All the world knows this,” cried Juan Garcia. “Montagnone’s will was proved in our courts. Don Lucas can produce it.”

Padre Herrera folded his arms, and rejoined :

“I ask the *Senor Guzman* to produce that will.”

Don Lucas looked at Garcia, who made a sign of assent. The administrator then stepped to a cabinet, near the window, and, pressing a spring, opened a private drawer. From this drawer he took a roll of parchment discolored with age.

“Here is the will of Don *Antonio Montagnone*,” said he, “by which I am constituted sole executor of his estate—in trust for an infant child.”

“That child—” began the padre.

“Died in infancy.”

“And the estates—”

“By a codicil of this will, the estates passed to Montagnone’s friend, *Lucas Guzman*.”

“And by this title, *Senor Guzman*, you hold the property?”

“It was the decision of our courts.”

Padre Herrera flung the parchment from him, and raised his hand toward heaven.

“*Senor Guzman!*” cried he, “and you, Juan Garcia, I here accuse you both of defrauding the heir of Montagnone of his sire’s possessions; of attempting to murder the Prince Montagnone, in Italy, by the hand of a hired bravo named Marini; of perjurying yourselves by falsely swearing to the death of Montagnone’s child; of degrading that child to the position of a serf; and finally, of forging a false codicil to that will, through which to obtain the estates, which, had Montagnone died without issue, would have reverted to the Republic.”

The priest, as he spoke these words in a solemn voice, turned to Herrera, who, at their close, motioned to the soldiers behind him. They advanced toward Don Lucas and the abate, but the latter sprung forward.

“Why should this mad priest’s assertions weigh against the law?” cried he. “This will was proved—”

“But Montagnone’s death is not proved,” said the priest.

“It is a lie,” cried the abate, struggling with the soldiers who now restrained him. “Tis all a vile collusion of these men. Your Excellency knows well that—”

“The will was proved,” here broke in Don Lucas. “Montagnone, my noble friend, is long since dead—”

At this moment, the door of the apartment was again opened, giving entrance to Don *Herrera Nunez*, and the merchant *Gonzalez*. These two advanced to the middle of the floor, the latter pressing opposite Guzman.

“What said Don Lucas?” asked the merchant. “That his friend Montagnone, was dead?”

Guzman uttered a loud cry, and fell senseless to the floor. The alcalde retreated before the merchant's gaze.

"In the devil's name, who are you?" he gasped.

"I am he who has more than once escaped the daggers of his good friends. I am—the Prince Montagnone!"

Juan Garcia saw that the game which he had played during a lifetime was ended. His hardihood forsook him. His eyes fell beneath the gaze of his injured friend; but, as their glance rested on the floor, it caught the gleam of Guzman's dagger. The alcalde stooped suddenly, raised the naked blade, and drove it heavily into his breast.

CHAPTER XXV.

FATHER AND SON.

THREE days elapsed after the suicide of Garcia. Rumors of approaching civic strife gathered strength. Provinces issued *pronunciamientos* against the administration, and a portion of the army under General Paredes declared open rebellion. All signs betokened a political change.

But the traders of the caravan, arriving safely, forgot their dangers in the quest of new gains. The authorities, rejoicing over the defeat of a famous robber-band, signified their content by condemning all prisoners to the garote.

In a house in Mexico were gathered several of the characters of our story. The merchant Gonsalvo, returned from his long banishment in season to counteract the schemes of the treacherous alcalde, sat beside his recovered son, Anselmo Zumozin, the heir of Montagnone. Outside the apartment, upon a balcony, were the priest Herrata and Don Ferrardo Nunez, and at a little distance sat Pomfret.

Zumozin's face was pale, and the trace of pain yet lingered upon it. The merchant Gonsalvo's countenance was overshadowed with thought.

"Anselmo," he remarked, "you surely will not leave me. Must I again lose the son whom Heaven has vouchsafed in my declining years? Who will uphold the name of our ancestors? Who will inherit my recovered wealth?"

"Father, I covet neither wealth nor station. The free mountain has been my home from childhood. Thither I return, and there, my father, I will welcome you."

"But, my son, there are duties to perform. Society and the State demand the assistance of such as you, Anselmo."

"Other duties, dearer far, call me to the scenes of my youth. I would do justice to the wronged—I would soothe the afflicted—I would redeem and exalt the race of my mother—the race of Zumozin."

Montagnone's eyes grew moist, as his thoughts went back to the time when the mother of Anselmo lay upon his bosom—his chosen bride, wildly loved, and never forgotten. He grasped his son's hand, and said, in the beautiful language of Holy Writ: "Whither thou goest, I will go."

The young man smiled gratefully, and half rising from the couch on which he reclined, beckoned to his friend Nunez.

"Ferrardo," said Zumozin, "we called one another by the dear name of 'brother' when I was a lonely serf, and you a cavalier. Ferrardo, are you not my brother still?"

"Till death, noble Anselmo," cried the young Captain, warmly "What do I not owe to you?"

"Hear you, my father?" said Zumozin, turning to Montagnone. "Ferrarda Nunez, the son of a friend whom you once loved, is the brother of your son. He must wed the niece of Juan Garcia, and be happy. To him I resign the wealth of Garcia, which is now ours. Shall it not be so, my father?"

"As it pleases you, my son Anselmo."

"No, no, it must not be," exclaimed Ferrardo. "I can not thus abuse your friendship. My own arm shall win me fortune, supported by the love of Isabella."

"The love of Isabella!" Those words called the blood into Zumozin's cheeks. But he pressed the hand of his friend.

"Ferrardo," he said, "you promised to be my brother. As a brother, then, I require you to gratify me in this thing."

The melancholy eyes of Anselmo sought the flushed face of his friend with a pleading expression. Don Ferrardo could not resist their appeal. He threw his arms around Zumozin's neck.

"My brother—my noble brother! May God reward you!"

The capture of Marani, the brigand, and the dispersion of his band, relieved the valley of Murillo from its dangerous neighbors of the "Outlaw's Mount." And it was not long before the lovely Inez, restored to her father's arms, beheld once more the gardens blooming around a new mansion, where, unchecked by the dread of robbers, she could listen, well pleased, to the thrumming of a light guitar touched by her lover-husband, the happy Lorenzo.

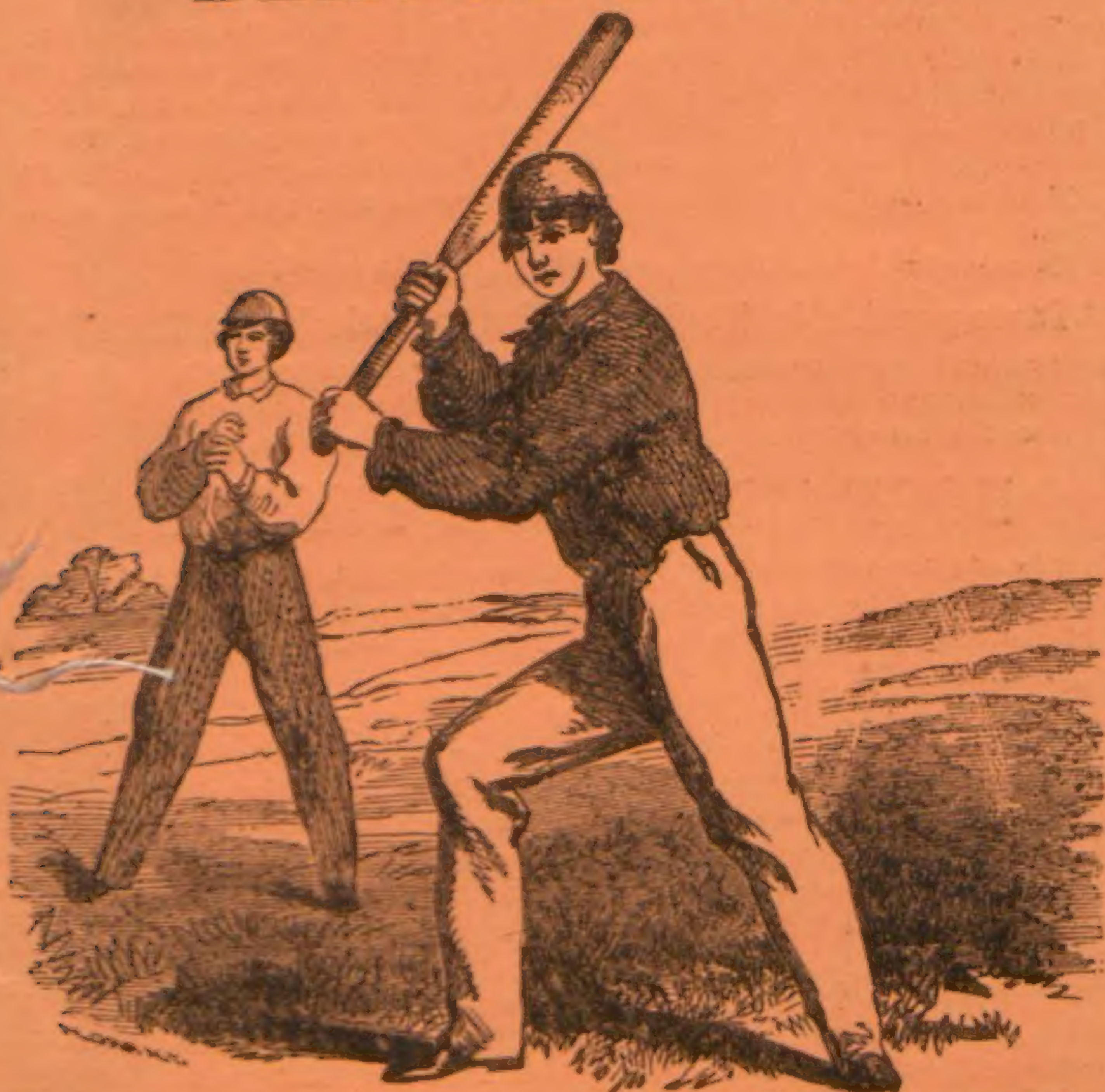
One alone, of all the band of Marani, was afterward seen in the valley of Murillo. This was the girl Berta, who survived the death of the brigand chief only to become deprived of reason. Her fate, however, was not a severe one, for the daughter of Murillo received and protected her, soothing her bewildered mind with friendly care.

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